Lilith

INDEPENDENT, JEWISH & FRANKLY FEMINIST

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HIV: The beast in the bedroom

a 21st Century love story

An egg donor revisits her choice

"We were all strangers..."

18 outsiders confess

Jewish teen girls who *like* their bodies?

VOLUME 29, NO. 3
L 2004 $4.95 CANADA $6.95
43>

Help us bring the words of the Torah to the children of the former Soviet Union...

Emily Dubois, a 17 year-old high school student in Palo Alto, California, had a Tzedakah project idea that was so compelling that she inspired *thousands* to get involved. Her story was so unbelievable that I wanted to become part of it myself.

> Emily was moved by the memory of the children lost during the Holocaust. So she decided to gather *one and a half million* pennies to represent the children who lost their lives and to give the money to families in need in Israel.

I bought a thousand of Emily's pennies for $1 each and invited Emily to fly to my studio in Maryland as the very first Hiddur Mitzvah Fellow. She will help me melt the pennies down with a torch and transform them into an eternal light we will then donate to a congregation in the former Soviet Union.

> A wonderful collaboration if we ended there! But the story goes on... The eternal light will shine over an Ark which we will fill with a Torah donated as well. We will also contribute substantial funds for the Torah education of young European children who might even now study in sanctuaries reclaimed from a horrible Nazi past.

The Hiddur Mitzvah Project from The Gary Rosenthal Collection

Let us look forward together! ***The Hiddur Mitzvah Project from Gary Rosenthal*** invites you to share in the mitzvah. Visit **www.hiddurmitzvah.org** for details.

My thanks to Emily and the many other people who inspire me daily!

The Hiddur Mitzvah Project from Gary Rosenthal, using art as a catalyst for service.

Lilith

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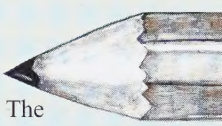

Our annual spotlight on books for young readers asks 18 writers to confess. The refugee, the girl too smart, the gay boy who played with dolls, the creative outcast—they're all here, given voice by Francine Klagsbrun, Ellen Kushner, Rebecca Hoffberger, Emily Nussbaum, Lore Segal, James Howe and others.

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Cover illustration by Yunmee Kyong.
©2004 Yunmee Kyong. To see more of her work, go to www.yunmee.com

Why is this magazine called LILITH?
In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

—from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, 23a-b

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From the Editor

"Chick." "Baby." Women have long been infantilized in language, even in these erstwhile terms of endearment. And we've hated it. But there's one way that we should strive to become more like infants. Even girl babies know how to ask for what they want. Their cries and demands may not always be answered, but there's no doubt that they feel entitled to voice them. Without saying—sometimes loudly—what we as women need, how are we going to change the world for the better?

Women's sex shops, women's philanthropic foundations

There's ample evidence that at least some women have trouble with the idea that it's OK to speak out. I spent time this summer with Jewish teen girls at summer camp (not the one appearing in this issue) and was knocked back to hear how commonly that old canard "JAP" got flung about as a label for peers who were too aggressive (also "too materialistic," but that's another story). And then, in another community, there was the lovely young woman in her late twenties who told me that enough of the world doesn't like the Jews anyway, so why does LILITH go public about bad things like domestic violence in the Jewish community?

To participate in repairing the world, we first have to be able to name—and then ask for—what we need. As simple as saying what's right for us and what's not. As simple as asking for help when a burden (physical or metaphorical) is too heavy to carry alone. And as complicated as figuring out the resources we need, step by step, while we improve our own lives and change other women's lives for the better. I've been aware, as we edited the amazingly frank articles in this issue, of how much more women now say than we used to. But this past season's conversations reminded me of how often women still silence our own needs.

In this context I've been thinking about women's sex shops and women's philanthropic foundations (how's that for a segue?) and about the growing popularity of two phenomena that, on their surface, seem ridiculously disparate. Sex shops run by and for women and philanthropic foundations by and for women—a pretty unlikely yoking? Not at all. They are two powerful (and empowering) examples of women acting to meet their needs; in one case the goal is to increase understanding about female sexuality, and in the other to increase the financial resources available to women and girls. Both endeavors bring a message: that we have to ask for what we need. And for enough of it.

Talking about sex and money is personal, political and often taboo. But another out-of-bounds topic gets even less air time, and that's leisure. Maybe I wouldn't have set this one before you if we were still living in the halcyon pre-laptop, pre-cell phone, pre-PDA era. It's hardly original to note that work, in the lives of many women, has become intractable for reasons other than mere survival. We create, labor, engage. So many of us are on absolutely all the time, just like our computers. And often we're also the generators keeping colleagues and family fully charged.

I write these words at the Jewish New Year, the time when we make an accounting of the soul. It's a time for looking ahead to how we're going to do things better in the time stretching out ahead of us. I propose that in the year to come we try giving ourselves permission to announce our needs, including the need for a tiny bit of leisure in each day. Just an appetizer-sized portion, carrying a trace of Shabbat into the work week, so that we bring into the fray not just the memory of Sabbath light, but also (especially) the idea of down time, time where we can just "be" and be off.

Shabbat is supposed to give us, as they say in Yiddish, a forshpeis, a foretaste of what it'll be like when the Messiah will grace us with her presence. Let's extend the image. How about weekday moments when we withdraw briefly from the preoccupations of work as an appetizer for the Shabbat to come—a little bit of legitimate weekday leisure?

What would this mean? We would have to ask (ask ourselves, really) for the time we need. A radical rethinking of the rhythms of life for women and for men, restraining the impulse to be on all the time. Just as we now reflexively turn off our cell phones and pagers when a movie begins, maybe we can admit the need to turn our work selves off for a few Shabbat-like moments every day. I'm trying hard to learn how.

Susan

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor-in-Chief

Soon appearing in a location near you (we hope) is the complex and thought-provoking exhibition "LILITH Magazine: The Voice of Jewish Women," which explores the most crucial, wave-making, life-changing subjects this magazine has tackled.

The LILITH exhibition has already drawn thousands of visitors in New York and Washington, Martha's Vineyard and East Hampton. Now you can catch the show until October 18 at Temple Beth El in Great Neck, New York, and from October 25 until December 8 at the Jewish Community Center in Houston. Visit www.Lilith.org for an updated schedule of other locations for this exhibition, to see more of its remarkable wall panels, and to find out the cities where LILITH writers are appearing.

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I'M STAYING HERE.
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Kol Ishah:
The Voices of Women.

Traditionally, the **voice** of the Jewish woman was **not to be heard** in public, lest it arouse men. **No more.** These pages are for news about Jewish women, **in our own strong voices.**

Babies Bearing Slogans

Jennifer Weiss and **Lauren Brown** have great memories of the political work they did while undergraduates at the University of Michigan. "We did stuff on choice and against U.S. involvement in Central America," says Weiss.

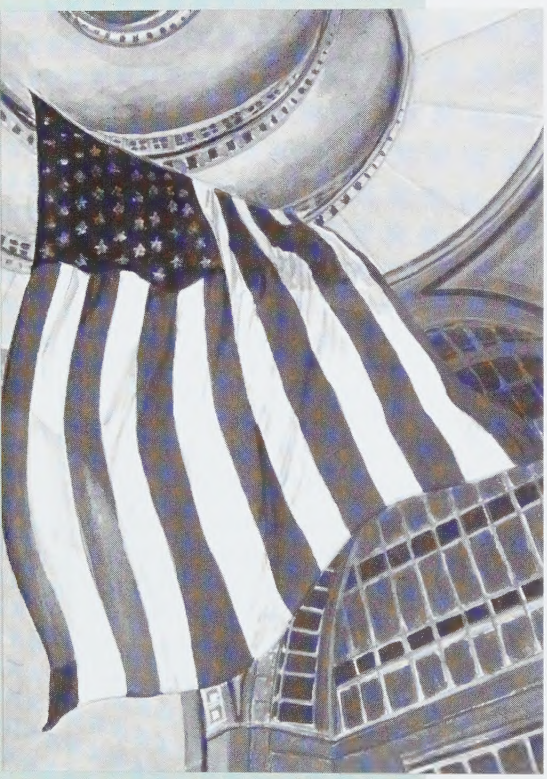
Then college ended. While both women remained active—Weiss in New York and Brown in Washington—it was not until they had children that they found a new direction for their activism. Brainstorming led to the creation in May of babypolitico, a children's clothing company that sells onesies and t-shirts with overtly progressive political messages: "Don't Mortgage My Future. Vote Kerry in 2004," "Activism Starts Early" and "I'm Too Young to Vote. What's Your Excuse?"

Weiss and Brown say they hope that people will see the shirts, smile, and think about the messages. "We want voters to take politics seriously because our children's futures are serious," says Weiss. "We want them to remember children's interests—from judges to Social Security—when they enter the voting booth." The company also hopes to goad young people into becoming politically involved. Their webpage profiles several inspiring activists ranging in age from 10 to 16.

All of babypolitico's products are made by American Apparel, a Los Angeles company known for paying livable wages and providing good working conditions for employees. In addition, babypolitico donates a portion of its receipts to the organization Big Brothers /Big Sisters. "They play a very important role in mentoring kids and providing role models," says Weiss.

Although the company (babypolitico.com) is still in its infancy, its founders have a grand vision. "Our ultimate goal is to become prominent enough to sponsor fundraisers to help children," Weiss says. "For us, that would be taking things to the next level."

—Eleanor J. Bader



"Flying High," watermedia, by Rosalie Ripaldi Shane
www.saxonvillestudios.com

Knocking on Dorm Doors to Mobilize Voters

At 25, **Margie Klein** has already had her first bill passed into law, traveled across India with the subcontinent's leading feminist activists, and helped save the Arctic national wildlife refuge from oil and gas drilling. But what really gets her excited these days is the idea of knocking on doors—in college dorm rooms.

"Some friends and I came up with the idea for Project Democracy while we were up in the Colorado mountains at a get-together for young activists," says Klein. "We began talking about the discrepancy between the number of students involved in service projects and the percentage who actually vote. We realized then if we could harness the incredible energy on college campuses, young people could take back this country in the next elections."

The conversations grew into a series of conference calls, and then fundraising, and suddenly Klein found herself at the helm of a new youth voting organization that aims to register 25,000 new student voters, and turn out 75,000 to the polls. "We were thinking big, and then we began thinking bigger," she explains. "The program was adopted by the League of Conservation Voters Education Fund, and then things really took off." Klein began planning alternative spring-break conferences in Florida, where students from all over the country flew down to learn how to register and mobilize their peers. Within a couple of months the idea for a grassroots youth-voting project had spread, and chapters of Project Democracy had sprung up on 30 campuses, ranging from Ohio State to University of New Mexico.

The idea is simple: while other organizations try to promote youth voting by buying spots on MTV, or hiring stars like Britney Spears to tout voting on Times Square billboards, Project Democracy talks with, not at, young people. Students fill out surveys that list the concerns most important to them. If a student names pro-choice issues, then she gets linked to the campus Students for Choice. If she cares about reducing pollution, she'll be contacted

by the student environmental group. And progressive groups on campus work to make sure students understand that they can only make an impact the issues they care about most if they register—and turn out to the polls.

Project Democracy's efforts are already showing results. As a result of the organizing at the University of Florida, Gainesville voting records for the presidential primary last March showed the highest youth voter turnout the city had ever seen. "We have a movement now of sorority members and football players and people who had never seen themselves as political before," says Klein. "We don't care if you wear the activist uniform. We're talking about building broader alliances."

As an observant Jew, Klein has sometimes had to struggle with balancing her role as a young director of a secular organization and her decision to be Shomer Shabbat. But she believes that the work that she does is part of her spirituality. "For me, the idea that people should have a stake in the future is the ultimate act of faith," says Klein. "Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said, 'When I walked [in the civil rights march] in Selma, my feet were praying.' I think that's the highest manifestation of Judaism." *—Orli Cotel*

Watch These Women

In the 2004 elections, there are three progressive women running for national office, each with ties to the Jewish community. All three have a strong shot at winning their races. Each is supported by Emily's List, a political network that helps elect pro-choice Democratic women:

Inez Tennenbaum, superintendent of public instruction in South Carolina, an elected office, is running for a U.S. Senate seat vacated by a Democrat. As a progressive, she supports reproductive rights, increased federal expenditures for education, creating incentives for corporations to keep jobs in the United States and improved health care for more citizens. Tennenbaum boasts a slew of familial and philanthropic ties to the Jewish community. A Methodist who is a strong supporter of Israel, she is married to a Jewish man; they are leading charitable supporters of the Jewish community in Columbia, South Carolina. With the state experiencing job losses, frustration, and a drop in Bush popularity, many political pundits believe that this strong, independent, tough-minded woman can win this race. www.inez2004.com

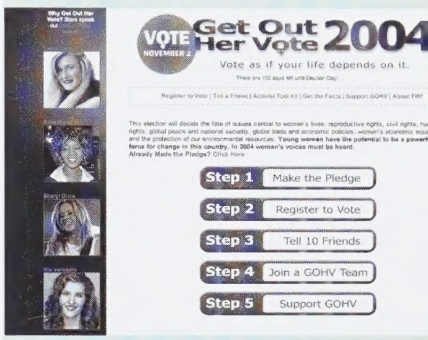
Allyson Schwartz, who for 14 years has served in the Pennsylvania State Senate, is running for Congress in the13th district of Pennsylvania, one of a handful of highly competitive and open races. She has been fighting for increased funding for pre-schools, full-day kindergarten, and reduced class size. She strongly favors reproductive choice for women. She forced insurance companies to cover necessary women's health services and provide mammograms to women over the age of 40, and worked to ensure quality standards of mammogram facilities. Schwartz has a deep commitment to Israel, has promoted Holocaust education and Holocaust survivor assistance through state legislation and grants and sits on the board of the National Jewish Democratic Council. www.allysonschwartz.com

Lois Murphy is running for Congress in the 6th district in Pennsylvania. She has served as associate legal counsel for NARAL Pro-choice America and as President and board member of NARAL Pro-Choice Pennsylvania for over 10 years. A graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, Murphy has worked for the Justice Department, in a private law firm, and ran a county campaign for Pennsylvania governor **Ed Rendell.** She is married to **Ben Eisner,** a Jewish labor lawyer.Though she is running against a one-term incumbent, polls suggest that the vast majority of voters in the district do not know who their congressperson is, a fact that gives Murphy a good shot at winning. www.LoisMurphy.org

—Wendy C. Wolf

Tell 10 Friends

Only one-third of young women (18-24) voted in the 2000 U.S. presidential election. The Feminist Majority Foundation has created a website—GetOutHerVote.org—where you can get materials to use in


VOTE
NOVEMBER 2
Get Out Her Vote 2004
Vote as if your life depends on it.
Step 1 Make the Pledge
Step 2 Register to Vote
Step 3 Tell 10 Friends
Step 4 Join a GOHV Team
Step 5 Support GOHV

helping students and others to register to vote. The site features endorsements from **Nia Vardalos** and others, and a place where you can register *yourself* to vote. The site also explains that a student can register—and vote—in the state where she is attending school, even if it is different from the state where her parents live.

Size Matters

Unmarried women are the largest nonvoting group of citizens in the United States. "One Vote Away," a six-minute film about women, politics, and voting, wants to reverse this alarming statistic. Produced by **Donald Goldmacher** and directed by **Deborah Hoffman** and **Frances Reid,** it is available on the website www.onevotefilm.com, where you can watch the film, order a copy, or download it free onto a DVD.

Volga Boatwomen

In June 2004, 250 women ranging in age from 15 to 84 convened in Moscow for a week-long trip down the Volga River. All were Jewish, except a few translators, and the group included 80 women from Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, with the rest from the United States, Germany and Israel. Participants met with activists and helped renew Judaism in the region.

The women seemed to feel like long-lost relations. In fact, **Duddie Garson** from the United States pulled out her family tree and found that **Sara Lifshitz** from Yakutsk, Russia (Siberia) with whom she was sharing breakfast actually was her cousin.

Six women had carried six torahs from the United States—from congregations, a havurah, a 92-year-old woman who survived the Holocaust, a Torah scribe on the lower East side of Manhattan—and delivered them into the arms of women from Belarus, Russia and Ukraine to bring back to their communities. As folksinger **Debbie Friedman** played guitar and sang, the women celebrated, dancing in the aisles of the Hermitage Theater in Moscow.

Below: After yoga, prayer service and breakfast, women depart from the boat to a welcome ceremony in Rybinsk.

Bottom: Marcia (Marty) Cohn Spiegel of California with Irina Kapko of Ukraine.

PHOTOS © JOAN ROTH

Top: Russian women listening as Rita Kashner reads a passage from a donated Torah scroll.

Above: Singer/songwriter Debbie Friedman.

When the voyage stopped in Rybinsk, Project Kesher, the women's organization convening the trip, conducted "Women Light the Night." This was a mitzvah project underwritten by **Joan Cohn** to provide light bulbs for a central town square that, because of budget cuts, had been dark and especially unsafe for women. Participants held candles as one of the new bulbs was turned on, a moment captured perfectly by **Lee M. Hendler** of Baltimore in the trip's closing skit. Hendler asked, "How many men does it take to screw in a light bulb in Rybinsk? One to welcome us. One to bless us. One to tell us how beautiful we are. And one to watch while a woman actually does the job!"

—Rita Kashner

Discrimination Against Women Rabbis?

The Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Judaism (R.A.) has released findings from its first-ever study comparing the careers of Conservative rabbis by gender, though the movement has been ordaining women rabbis since 1985. Thirty percent of all ordained Conservative rabbis since 1985 are women, and the 43-page report noted gender disparities in salary and job advancement, revealing some unforeseen and alarming trends.

First, the usual but still sobering facts: male rabbis' salaries on average exceed those of those of women holding comparable positions by a whopping 21,000 dollars. Also: only 15 per cent of all women rabbis with children work in congregations. And of the women who do, few had the "power" pulpit positions.

And here is where the study results become even more upsetting: nearly 40 percent of the women rabbis surveyed were not married. Of those who were married, less than half had children, whereas most of their male counterparts were married, with kids. Clearly, after nearly 20 years of the Conservative movement's ordaining of women rabbis, they are facing the same old dilemma: having to choose between career and family.

"What I find most interesting about the results is the vast number of women alongside an emerging number of men who are avoiding the pulpit because of its nature," said **Rabbi Karen G. Reiss Medwed,** 35, a rabbi-educator and the mother of an infant and a toddler. "I count myself among those who don't want a pulpit—because it prevents me from living the Jewish family life that I not only enjoy but that I preach others should also observe." But for women who haven't given up on being pulpit rabbis, the present is not cheerful. An observer at several recent rabbinical conventions told LILITH "I've seen enthusiastic women rabbinical students metamorphosed into disappointed people a few years later. "

In response to the study, the R.A. said that it is committed to "sweeping reforms in policies and programs" for the advancement of women rabbis. One suggestion the R.A. is floating in response to evidence that some congregations just haven't been "adequately exposed" to women rabbis is to create a video featuring women rabbis "preaching, teaching and talking" for use by synagogue search committees.

—Alice Sparberg Alexiou

Jewish Women Watching

Jewish Women Watching, the Guerilla Girls of the Jewish world, have added political buttons and postcards to their resolutely iconoclastic repertoire. Visit jewishwomenwatching.com to discover that the Jewish voices you hear quoted in the mainstream press don't often speak these opinions.

The first High Holidays message from Jewish Women Watching, four years ago, consisted of cards declaring "Sexism Is a Sin." This year they address the U.S. presidential election. The group operates anonymously, "to focus attention on the issues—not ourselves," so part of the charm of communicating with these women by email is seeing whose name appears at the bottom of the reply. Some correspondence comes over the name of such deceased Jewish female activists as **Ernestine Rose;** the latest missive was signed "Yours in sisterhood, **Rose Schneiderman** for JWW."

From Odessa, where they expect rabbis to be both Orthodox and male:

Julia Grischenko, 28, head of a Reform congregation in Odessa, Ukraine, aspires to be the first female rabbi in Ukraine, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported in August. Grischenko is facing, to put it mildly, an uphill battle, "in a country where Jews and non-Jews alike expect rabbis to be both Orthodox and male," wrote reporter **Sue Fishman.** Grischenko, who studied for two years at Machon, an institute in Moscow run by the Reform movement, is now a student at the rabbinical college in Berlin. For the time being she has had to leave her 18-month-old daughter in Odessa with her husband. "A rabbi is a teacher, and that's what I want to do," she told Fishman. "The young generation, my generation, is leading our parents back to Judaism. I'm very sure that my daughter will know even more than me, because she's growing up with it. She was singing 'Shabbat Shalom' in the womb."

Dirty Laundry

The Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv has reported that the Israeli Defense Forces, in a cost-cutting move, decided to do more of its laundry in two in-house industrial laundry facilities, instead of sending it out. Also, instead of using civilians to operate the army laundry, the IDF will use female—not male—recruits.

More Teen Girls Getting Breast Implants

The American Society of Plastic Surgeons reports that increasing number of teenage girls are getting breast implants: Nearly 4,000 girls 18 or younger had the procedure in 2003, compared to about 2,500 in 2001. There has never been a safety study of breast implants for girls under 18, says **Dr. Diana Zuckerman,** president of the non-profit National Research Center for Women and Families.

Unlike rhinoplasty ("nose jobs"), this procedure is not one that Jewish girls are more likely to have, says Cornell's **Joan Jacobs Brumberg,** author of two books on teenage girls and body image (see page 25). Still, says Brumberg, "certainly, in affluent communities in the US, wherever the pressure to have a perfect body is very intense, there will be Jewish girls who seek big breasts through medical enhancement." Brumberg says that she is not in favor. "It's a quick fix that has medical risks, and the motivation that drives it is often shallow, immature, and unrealistic. Having bigger breasts does not really make life better or increase self-esteem for girls.

Multiculturalism Arrives at Hadassah

They come from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Israel, Iraq, UK, Sweden, Columbia, the Former Soviet Union, and Iran. Their ages range from early 30s to women in their 60s. Despite their very different backgrounds—or maybe because of them—they've all joined in Hadassah activities in the Boston area. This multicultural group is about to enter the second year of Hadassah's two-year Leadership Academy, a program designed to bring new members into the organization at a time when volunteerism in women's organizations is dipping alarmingly low.

Muriel Heilberger, who leads the group, came up with the idea of Hadassah's outreach to these new Americans. Heilberger's previous work experience included refugee resettlement and immigrant rights. She told LILITH that she had thought about how the issues on which Hadassah takes positions—domestic violence and abortion rights, organ donation and stem cell research, hate crimes and separation of church and state—would filter through to foreign-born women.

"We've created a community of women who have had to recreate themselves, as Americans," said Heilberger. "Their relationship is very intense." She notes the diversity of the group, with many members from countries with no tradition of pluralism. All of which, she says, makes for a wide range of perspectives about pluralism in the Jewish community, "being Jewish in America, as part of a larger progressive tradition."

The group follows a curriculum created by **Regina Stein,** director of Hadassah Leadershop Academy, www.hadassah.org, that includes up to 10 hours of reading for each monthly session and covers Jewish values and domestic political issues. As part of their study of advocacy work, Heilberger's group went to Washington, where they met with members of Congress as well as with **Dr. Susan Blumenthal,** U.S. Assistant Surgeon General. Next year they will travel to Israel together; after graduating from the program, the women will do a year-long internship with Hadassah.

—A.S.A.

Bookies. (It's Not What You Think.)

During the late 1990's, artist/teacher/writer **Jennifer Fink** was supervising art education majors at Brooklyn's Pratt Institute. "What came up again and again was how alienated K-12 pupils were from books," says Fink. "Many of the classrooms my students worked in had no texts or not enough texts. They used worksheets. It struck me that literature had been taken out of literacy." Fink, along with artist **Ellen Blum,** put together an ad hoc group of "fellow travelers and family" to take action. Their efforts turned into the Gorilla Press, a workshop that promotes literacy through book creation.

Participants write and illustrate their own work in free classes, which stress the intellectual rigor of art and highlight the relationship between visual imagery and language. At the end of each six-week cycle, their work is compiled, printed and bound, and each student gets a copy of the finished product. "I believe in learning through doing," says Fink. "A book you make is of greater value than one that is handed to you."

To date, the Gorillas have partnered with eight agencies, including the Archdiocese of New York; The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center; Makor/92nd Street Y; Readnet, a Bronx Charter School; and the South Street Seaport. Several participants have stayed on, becoming Press volunteers. "One boy we met in 2000 is now in college. He became homeless while we were working with him. Despite adversity, he's hung on and is now a mentor," says Fink. "For kids like him, meeting others who are interested in art or writing is empowering."

Fink sees the Gorilla Press (www.gorillapress.com) as an outgrowth of her belief in tikkun olam. "I was brought up valuing feminism and social justice and was taught to take responsibility for others," she says. "At the same time, art saved me from a lot of things, including the banality of mainstream culture. The Press is a way for me to connect with people and create community across lines of race, class and sexuality."

—Eleanor J. Bader

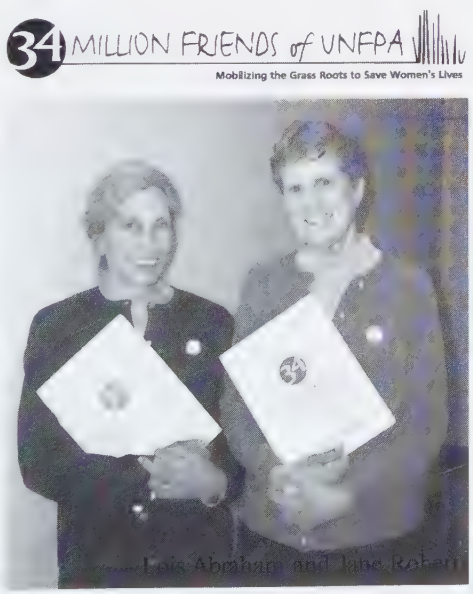
Friends (and Enemies) of Reproductive Rights

In this hotly contested U.S. presidential race, the assault on women's right to control their own bodies continues. In May, a group of anti-choice legislators introduced into both the House and the Senate the "Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act," which would require doctors to recite this statement to women about to have an abortion procedure: "Congress finds that there is substantial evidence that the process of being killed in an abortion will cause the unborn child pain, even though you received a pain-reducing drug." Doctors who do not comply could be fined up to $25,000. The bill is presently pending in the House and the Senate. Then in July, the House Appropriations Committee passed an amendment to the annual federal health spending bill that would allow any health care providers, from hospitals to individual doctors, to deny access to or even information about abortion services. The amendment was advocated by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In a related story, women in New York, Wisconsin and Texas have reported to Planned Parenthood that pharmacists in their respective states refused to fill birth control prescriptions on so-called moral grounds. Planned Parenthood is asking all women who have had this experience to get in touch with them (www.ppaction.org).

And, in July, President Bush—for the third year in a row—withheld Congress-approved funds from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) totaling $34 million, alleging that UNFPA supports forced abortions in China. This despite a report from a fact-finding team picked by Bush which could not verify this claim. The United States is the only country ever to use politics to block funding to UNFPA. Expressing its disappointment over the Administration's decision, the population fund declared: "The money is urgently needed to slow the spread of HIV/AIDS, prevent maternal deaths, provide family planning and reduce recourse to abortion."

The organization 34 Million Friends, www.34millionfriends.org, was founded two years ago by **Jane Roberts** and **Lois Abraham,** both of New Mexico, in direct reaction to this outrageous action by the Bush Administration. Furious at hearing the news, the women decided on an appropriate response: they would convince 34 million people to each donate one dollar, to make up for the lost funds. So far, 34 Million Friends has raised more than two million dollars. Donations go directly to UNFPA, where they are used to save women's lives by training midwives, providing contraceptives, and running health-care related programs that include HIV/AIDS prevention. —*A.S.A.*



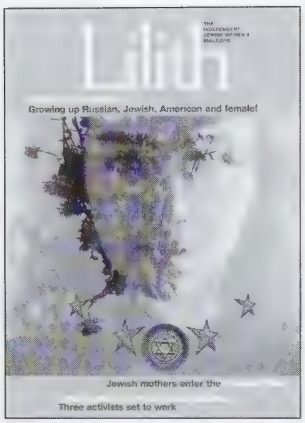
Running the Numbers

(These findings brought to you by the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey of Jews in North America)

- Among Jewish college who are dating, a little over one-third of students with two born-Jewish parents date only Jews, and more than half date both Jews and non-Jews.
- Fertility among Jewish women is lower than fertility for all US women, whether we look at the number of women who are childless or the average number of children ever born. And the NJPS goes on to echo the alarm on the Jewish birthrate first sounded in the 1970's: that overall Jewish fertility is too low to replace the Jewish population.
- "Moreover," the survey goes on, "a sizeable fraction of children raised by Jewish women and men in inter-faith homes are not raised as Jews." Thirty-one percent of all Jews now married are intermarried. (Intermarriage refers to a marriage between a Jew and someone who is not Jewish at the time of the survey. A marriage between a born Jew and someone who has converted to Judaism is not considered intermarriage.)
- While adoption has satisfied the desire of people to become parents, it has "not significantly augmented" the declining Jewish population in North America.

(You can see more findings from the National Jewish Population Survey at www.UJC.org)

Readers Respond



MORE ABOUT MOMMIES

On the problems of mothers ["Mommy Wars," Summer 2004]. I am in exactly this position—a professional woman (with a Ph.D.), unemployed because I followed my husband to where his job was (and my options were limited), mother of two young children, trying to "keep my hand in" while still being mom. **Yes, I have the choice to stay at home or work. But I don't want choices. I want options.**

I want to be able to work and be a parent. I want to be able to take time off to raise my kids if I decide to and then go back to work. I want flexibility, and I want it for my husband too. The true "feminist" revolution will come when we all (women and men) have the right and ability both to be parents and have careers at the same time.

Deborah Fripp
Carrollton TX

I eagerly await each issue of LILITH magazine and I thank you for being a voice for Jewish women. This letter is in response to the article on "Career Shock: A New Jewish Mother Enters the Mommy Wars" by Sarah Blustain. **I would like to invite Sarah to change places with the young mothers in my office. They don't have the luxury of working at home,** having a nanny in the next room and being able to run in to see their baby every time it cries. They have to juggle their time when their children are sick, worry about day care and pray they won't lose time when they do have to stay home with their sick child.

Annette Gross
Carmel IN

Sarah Blustain replies: The letter-writer is correct that I don't represent all women with my story, nor was I trying to. **My point was not to compare myself with all other women but with MEN in my similar situation,** to highlight the compromises that educated, ambitious women make for children that educated, ambitious MEN don't make.

SO...IT'S A NEAR-PERFECT WORLD?

We agree with LILITH's conclusion that the Jewish community, as employers, should be a full participant in creating a balance between the work and family life of its employees. At Hadassah, the largest women's organization in the United States, we have introduced a parental/primary caretaker policy consistent with our Jewish values and our fiduciary responsibility to our members and donors. **Hadassah's policy will offer any employee, whether mother or father, the ability to draw on a combination of benefits to greet a new child** into his or her family. These include one week of paid leave for every year of service up to six years, use of banked sick/vacation time, and/or a short-term disability plan significantly better than what is required by law. We have for some time offered our employees the opportunity to use their banked sick/vacation leave to serve as primary caretaker for an aging or ill parent. As a leading advocate on women's issues, Hadassah is proud to have its employee policies consistent with its public policies.

June Walker
New York NY

[The writer is national president of Hadassah]

RE: "Why Women's Organizations Won't Repair Our Mind-Body Split" [Summer 2004]. Susan Sapiro said she cited only one Jewish organization that had a paid maternity leave policy that guaranteed an income for longer than a week. We'd like to add one more to her list. Based on time of service, the Jewish Women's Foundation of New York provides its employees between three and six weeks of full salary, less their short-term disability payments, for the care of a newborn or adopted child.

Betsy Miller Landis
Sherri Greenbach
New York NY

[The writers are, respectively, president and executive director of the Jewish Women's Foundation of New York]

Your editorial on the failure of the organized Jewish community to confront the changes in family and gender roles left me sort of laughing and crying. I wrote a piece on the same issues in 1976. At the time, on-the-job childcare was a mirage. Ten years later, it was a campaign issue. Now there are babies in the Pentagon. But **Jewish community organizations have changed scarcely at all.** Jewish women are too busy dodging the guilt trips over how few children we have to confront the question of why we have so few.

Marian Henriquez Neudel
by email

LILITH reserve the right to edit letters. We welcome articles, fiction, poetry, and memoirs. No submissions can be returned without SASE.

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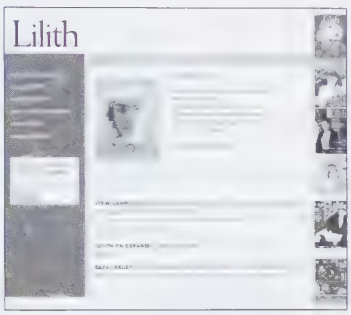
Are you the person who called the LILITH office to find out about an article on adult bat mitzvah ceremonies? Or the one who has been struggling to recall the name of the author who wrote about adopting a Chinese daughter? Or the date when LILITH ran an analysis of Jewish women's philanthropy? You can now find answers to these and other ineffable questions on LILITH's freshly redesigned website.



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On the site you can also make a tax-deductible contribution honoring a special woman in your life, subscribe or give a gift subscription, talk back to the editors, and much, much more.

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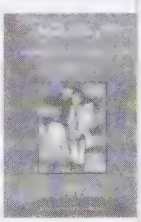

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A Jewish woman and her boyfriend talk about the issues that are tearing them apart

HIV: The Beast in the Bedroom

by Miriam Stone

Katie Romansky and Lamont Valentin have been dating for a year and half. *Katie, a native of the DC suburbs and the product of what she calls an "upper-middle-class white Jewish family," is working towards a master's degree in urbanism and community health at Columbia University. From making a panel for the AIDS quilt when she was a child, to running a pediatric AIDS fundraiser as an undergraduate at Columbia, to working with HIV-infected kids at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Washington, DC, Katie's passion and life work have always been about pediatric AIDS. But when she met Lamont at a camp for teens with HIV the summer before her senior year of college, her personal and professional lives came crashing together in an unexpected way.*

Lamont, a 20-year-old from the Bronx who identifies as black, Puerto Rican and Christian, was infected with HIV at birth. His mother died of AIDS when he was a child. He has been through the foster care system and adoption, and has lived in a group home for teens with HIV. He now lives in his own apartment in upper Manhattan. This past spring he completed culinary school and now works in the kitchen of a downtown New York City restaurant.

I recently sat down with each of them, separately, in Katie's small Chelsea apartment. Katie, a short, pretty brunette with a nose ring, leaned in towards me to speak openly and eloquently about her life. Lamont is about her height and wears a gold stud in each ear. He has adorable dimples, a killer smile and a raspy voice, which was interrupted occasionally by asthma-induced coughing and wheezing. He leaned back on the bed and played nervously with the edge of the comforter as we spoke.

katie: I met Lamont when I was a counselor at Camp TLC, a summer camp for HIV-positive teens. The first time I remember talking to him was because I thought he was calling me fat.

lamont: The last day of camp I went up to her and said "Damn girl, you got a phatty." And she was like, "What do you mean I'm fat?" And I'm like "No, P-H-A-T—pretty hot and tempting."

k: But at that time I thought of him as a camper, even though he was old enough to be a counselor. I thought he was this totally ghetto kid with his doo-rag and his Timberlands. He was even missing a front tooth. But one night near the end of camp I really took notice of him. There was this young girl who was very sick with both cancer and AIDS—she had a lot of social issues, like she'd cling on to anyone and she always had a crush on one counselor or another. On talent night Lamont and his friend Chris brought her up on stage and put her in a chair and sang this Usher song to her. She was thrilled—here were these two big-shot, obnoxious, good looking older guys crooning to her in front of everyone. She was so, so happy, and it made me look at Lamont in a very different way.

l: Once we got back to New York some of us from camp formed this group called HOLLA^2—Helping Others Live Life Against AIDS. We did things like support and education about the virus. Katie was in it so I saw her all the time. I always used to pass at her during meetings, you know, make stupid comments. But I never thought it was going to go anywhere—we come from different backgrounds, different cultures, we're like yin and yang. I was living in a group home for teens with the virus when things started to happen with Katie.

k: We went with HOLLA^2 to the Ryan White Youth AIDS Conference in Texas, and we got stuck there for a few days because of a snow storm in New York.

l: It was Valentine's Day when we were in Texas. And my magic finally worked [laughs]....No, I was just playing around, dancing with this girl, and Katie was all pissed off. We talked about it that night, and that's when things started to happen between us.

k: There were a lot of complicated emotions. I always thought if this kind of situation arose that I would be the last person in

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the world to discriminate and say I wouldn't date someone HIV positive. But at the same time, I didn't know if I was doing it just to prove that I wasn't afraid. And even though I knew kissing and everything was safe, it's still different when you're doing it. This is all besides the fact that he was 18 and I was 21. He was struggling to get his high school degree and I was at an Ivy League college, and I'm this upper-middle-class white girl and he was living in a group home, which means he couldn't even be out on a school night. I never thought it would work back in New York. I mean, we don't live in a world where it's acceptable to have a boyfriend who's HIV positive.

I: I guess it was fate, what happened in Texas. It changed who I was. I wanted to take it to another level right then but she wasn't ready. But when we got back to New York I was like, I got this far, I'm not giving up. So we went to movies and chilled, and we started to get closer and closer. Little by little she let go—at first she wouldn't let me come to her dorm, then two weeks later I'm at her dorm. And the next thing you know—a year and a half later, we're still together.

K: I only told a few close friends at first, who were all very supportive, but I kept it quiet. Then Lamont got really sick and was hospitalized. He had been running around from Manhattan to his school in the Bronx and partying. He ended up having a severe asthma attack. And I just had this epiphany —like in the movies when someone's really sick and you think, "Life is short—why waste time?" So we decided to try it for a little while. All of my friends at school loved him.

My family had met Lamont when I was working with HOLLA^2 so they already knew his status when we started dating. They were very supportive at first—no one mentioned the sex part, but I assured them that we were careful and cautious about everything. But then I came down with bacterial pneumonia, which is pretty common in people with HIV. Even though I knew we had been extremely careful, I was panicked that somehow I had become infected, so I told my family I was worried. It was a hellish two-month period while we were waiting for my final results. My family went nuts. They were furious with me. All of a sudden I felt like there was no family support. I felt like Lamont had this scarlet letter A on his forehead. We even broke up for awhile. Luckily, I was okay.

Things are somewhat better now. Even though my parents want to help him and would do anything in the world for him, I know they'd so much rather that I not be with him. They feel horrible for him because he's had so much to deal with. I was brought up in a family where we were taught that we were very fortunate, and that we had a responsibility to help other people. If there's one Hebrew word I know, it's mitzvah. The thing is, sometimes I just feel this intense responsibility for him because I know that I have all of these resources to help him, so why wouldn't I? My family feels that way too—Lamont needed a suit for his high school graduation, and my dad found a suit from one of his friends and dry cleaned it and Fedexed it to him at the group home.

But sometimes I feel like his case manager or social worker. When I first met him, his health was very poor. He had a hard time adhering to his regimen, which is a common problem among teens with HIV. Because of that, he is resistant to almost all of the available medications. I told him when we got together that he would have to take his medicine if he was going to be with me, because I wasn't going to be with someone who was going to kill himself.

A few months after we got together, the doctors realized that he had become resistant to his current combination. When they put him on his new regimen, I made sure to research the combination to make sure it would be effective. I found that one of the drugs he was on depressed the effects of the Atazanavir. I didn't want to double-cross his doctor, so I emailed my boss from NIH, who contacted her colleagues. They confirmed my research and Lamont had his doctor switch his meds. I'm lucky that I had access to the newest research. And since Lamont is on his last drug options—he is resistant to everything else—it's a race against time.

Now Lamont knows to take his meds and I don't have to ask him. I worry what will happen to him if I'm not here to help deal with things like this. Lamont has never had anyone as involved in his every day life as I am.

Though my parents would do anything in the world for Lamont, I know they'd rather I not be with him.
—Katie

I: My mom passed away when I was seven, and I was in and out of foster homes since I was three. I never knew my dad. Supposedly he says I'm not his son. I have other siblings, but I don't know where they are. I was adopted when I was 13, but it wasn't working out, so I moved into the group home when I was 18. My [adoptive] parents recently moved to Florida, so I don't really talk to them now.

K: His mom was a crack addict and there were abuse allegations, which is why he was put in foster care when she was still alive. I can't even imagine what his life was like. He won't eat pancakes now because when he was little that was the only thing he could make for himself—all they had in the

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house was the batter. If I even tickle his arm he jumps because when he was little there were cockroaches in his bed.

Lamont was sort of a difficult kid, as you can imagine, and he never got along with his adoptive parents. Moving to a group home was a pretty drastic move, since he was this homophobic kid from the Bronx and he was living in a "stable" home at the time. The group home was in Manhattan and, though everyone was an HIV-positive teenager and African American or Latino, they were almost all gay or bisexual.

I: The group home was really tough, but I got a lot out of it. Looking back at myself then, I was very ignorant and homophobic. I was so much into the Bronx attitude, just not giving a fuck. No one ever hit on me, but sometimes I felt like I was alone because I was the only straight guy there. We had support groups, but it was more like a drug support group. Me, I never did drugs. I never got so fucked up I didn't know who I slept with the next morning and caught the virus. That's not what happened to me. I've always known that I had the virus. Just like you know that you're a female or a male. I didn't feel like they really understood me at the group home. No one can really understand—you say you do, you can empathize, but you can't walk in my shoes.

I've also had this one doctor since I was 18 months old. But when I'm 21 I'll have to see an adult doctor. That's going to be hard.

K: Sometime I get really exhausted from fixing things for him all the time. His Medicaid benefits just got cut off again and he was fired from one of his jobs. I have to help him send out resumes again—since he's dyslexic things like writing a cover letter are really difficult for him to do on his own. I want to help him; I was brought up to believe that if you have the resources to help other people, then you should. But sometimes I feel like helping Lamont is all I do, and it leaves me with very little energy for the other things in my life.

I'm afraid of what might happen to him if we broke up. He's said to me that he made it all these years without me and he could do it again if he had to. But at the same time, I've seen his health improve so much since I've been with him. I don't want to give myself too much credit—maybe he just needed to know that someone cared about him and loved him, and I happened to be that person. But if I leave, he has no one else who is obligated to help him. If I'm in trouble my parents will help me. He doesn't have that.

It's never going to be normal between us. I feel like I can't talk to him sometimes. He doesn't have the frame of reference to help me with issues I'm having with my family or friends, and my problems all appear so insignificant next to his. Also, I can't really talk to him about what I am learning in school, either because I don't have the patience to really explain it or because it hits too close for him. I'd also like to be in a physical relationship where I do not have to worry all the time. I'd like to not feel guilty when he wants to take me out for dinner that he's spending what little money he has on our meal.

I: It's been good between us. I don't want it to end. But I feel like one day it's going to…and I don't know how I'm going to take that. But when it comes I'm going to have to face it.

The biggest problems between us are [HIV] status and financial. I mean, culturally, it's not such a problem. These days there's so much mixing going on it doesn't matter anymore. But I know it might be difficult for her some of her relatives, like her grandparents, to accept me because I'm black. Her grandma was alive during the Holocaust. Jews were discriminated against because

It's never going to be normal between us.
—Katie

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of what they believed in. So if you're hating on me because of my complexion then you're causing the same situation for me right now.

And financially…well, I know Katie's going to make more money than me, and that doesn't bother me; that's sexist. But someday she's going to want a real life and there's so little I can give her. I can barely give it to myself. Opportunities are not there for me.

But the whole HIV thing—that's real big. Your money can be replaced, but this is your life. Katie would feel like she was dead if she were to get infected. I don't think she'd be able to live with it. I don't think I'd be able to live with it either, just having that on my conscience. And I want to say that physical intimacy is not a big thing in a relationship, but it does count. Katie and I have to be so cautious in everything we do that it's hard for us to just relax and have fun. And if we wanted to have kids we'd have to go through sperm-washing, which is really expensive, or we would have to adopt. Nothing's easy.

With her, I want to strive harder. I know how much I want to be with her, and I feel like I make her happy and I know she makes me happy. She can be a pain in the ass, but I'd rather her be a pain in the ass than anyone else. I like that pain in the ass.

k: Lamont would do anything in the world for me. Sometimes I can't even imagine what it would be like without him around—who would help me bring my suitcase down the stairs and help me look after the puppy? Who would go out in the middle of the night to buy me Lactaid milk so I can have cereal in the morning? Lamont helps me with everything in my day-to-day life.

It's such an inspiration for me to have someone in my life every day who's been through what he has. He's a walking miracle to me. The fact that he's even alive and that he made it through this time when the only treatment out there was AZT, that he went through foster care and he's made it through high school and culinary school, makes me so proud of him.

My other relationships have been with these upper-middle-class white guys from my high school or college. Most of them were complete assholes. I never felt appreciated or that I had any control in the relationship. And now I have this person who would do anything for me. I can't imagine giving that up. And it's hard for me to imagine being in another relationship now because I would never be able to give someone else as much as I'm able to give him.

But there's so much other baggage. In one sense I wonder what this relationship would be like outside of all these issues. I'm not sure I'd even be with him if he didn't have AIDS, because what he's been through is part of what makes him so amazing. And then of course if he didn't have it I wouldn't have even met him.

I know that when I tell people that my boyfriend is in culinary school or that I met him working at an AIDS camp that they aren't picturing who he really is. And I can't just come out and say that he has AIDS. I wish it was more normal and accepted because it gets so difficult to have to hide it all the time.

My life is not promised tomorrow—no one's life is, but with me it's different.
—Lamont

I feel very isolated. There's so little research out there on serodiscordant or mixed-status couples who are straight—only really on gay couples. I bring a lot of stuff from our relationship into my public health classes, but I talk about it as if it's not us. I recently wrote a research proposal on sexual behavior and sexual health knowledge among perinatally-acquired HIV-infected teenagers. No one expected these kids to live long enough to become teenagers.

I don't think I look at Lamont everyday and think oh, he has AIDS, he could die, especially because he is so much healthier now. I protect myself in this little world with him where I think about it but I don't think about it at the same time, which is hard because my personal and professional lives have become so intertwined. I'm just not sure how long I can go on like this.

l: My life is not promised tomorrow—no one's life is, but with me it's different. In some cases the medicine just stops working for people. I have to live my life now.

I just won this essay contest for kids in foster care. Katie and my case manager kept encouraging me to enter it. Then the next thing I know, I won. I've never won shit in my life. It was the first time I'd come out in public with my status. People were coming up to me at the ceremony and saying how impressed they were that I could do that.

I'm not into really into telling people my status, though. The more you dwell on it the more you feel like shit's not going to work out for you. You gotta keep going on, because once you stop, life is hard to take.

It took a lot for me to get here—to get into Katie's head, to sit on this bed and talk to you. And it will take a lot more for me to get wherever I'm going. But I think everything has a purpose. There's a reason I'm here talking to you. I'm here on this earth for a reason. So whatever comes, it comes. And when it ends, it ends. And probably my name's going to be remembered. But I just keep going because I've got to, and I wasn't told to stop, so I'm not going to. And if someone tells me to stop—well I've never listened before, and I'm not going to start now. ●

Katie welcomes your questions and comments at kmr26@columbia.edu and encourages you to visit www.jdaf.org, the website for Camp TLC (Teens Living a Challenge), run by the Joey DiPaolo AIDS Foundation.

Miriam Stone is the author of *At the End of Words: A Daughter's Memoir* (Candlewick, 2004) She lives in Brooklyn, where she works as freelance writer and editor, contributes often to LILITH—see page 32—and is completing a novel.

a good egg: a donor's story

by "Rebecca Greenberg" as told to Esther D. Kustanowitz

In fall 2001, LILITH published a report on the growing number of requests for Jewish women's eggs for in-vitro fertilization. LILITH noted that of the few young Jewish women who had initially responded to ads offering escalating sums to donors with high SAT scores and four Jewish grandparents, all had ultimately rejected the idea of becoming egg donors.

Rebecca Greenberg's story didn't begin any differently. As a 19-year-old college student at a large state university in the early 1990s, Rebecca (a pseudonym) saw an ad in her college paper offering egg donors a financial incentive of $5,000. She sat through an information session with about 200 other young women, and after an "excruciatingly honest" description of the process, Rebecca's enthusiasm cooled. Almost a decade later, Rebecca acted on her original impulse and became an egg donor. Recently she talked about why she made this uncommon decision, and about the changes since in her own life.

My journey to egg donation was a long one. I considered the process three separate times. After that first information session, I knew it wasn't for me. Not then. The second time, although the money and prospect of providing eggs to an infertile couple still appealed to me, it still seemed too much of a commitment, and it felt a little sordid that I might be doing it only for the money. By the time I was out of college and gainfully employed, the money wasn't my central impetus any more, and I went as far as asking my family for a medical history, which is a required part of the screening process. But, I opted out, again.

Then came 9/11.

Like many New Yorkers, I wanted to help, but didn't know how. They wouldn't even allow people to give blood. Then I remembered egg donation. Finally, the timing was right: I wasn't married and had no significant other in my life, I was physically ready, I had the time to commit to the process, and this was something I could do for someone else. It felt to me that helping people create families is doing the best work.

People asked, "Wouldn't you want to meet the child one day?"

By the time the LILITH cover story came across my desk at the Jewish organization where I worked in 2001, the issue was fully back on my radar. At an office study session, I learned that it is the womb, not the egg or the sperm, that determines if a baby is Jewish. I now understood that Jewish couples preferred Jewish eggs not for religious reasons but because they thought that, this way, their baby would have a better chance of looking like them.

Because I had observed fertility problems in my own friends and colleagues in the Jewish community, I had hoped that the clinic would designate my eggs for donation to a Jewish couple. Officially, the clinic denied my request, but implied that they don't get many people who look like me, So I assumed, and was satisfied knowing, that Jewish couples would likely be the first in line for my eggs.

With a motivation more powerful than money, I finally committed: I would become an egg donor.

On college campuses, the age of the intended audience for the egg donation ads is between 18 and 22. But the Center for Human Reproduction states that egg donors should be between the ages of 21 and 34, and notes that exceptions are only occasionally made for ages of 18 to 21 and 34 to 35. Even at 21, potential donors may be too young to fully understand potential complications or consequences, which is why a detailed prescreening and explanation of the process and the risks is considered so important.

I was a little concerned that the IVF procedure might pose a risk to my own reproductive future, but, since I'd had two pregnancies in the past, I felt pretty confident about my fertility. [Rebecca opted for termination of the first pregnancy, and the second ended in a miscarriage.] Because I was doing something good, I really believed that I would not be harmed by the process. In addition, the chance to help potential parents become a family was my opportunity to balance out the reproductive choices I had made in the past. I even saw donating my eggs as an opportunity to "right a wrong."

In my professional and social circles, I was very open about my decision. My belief was that it was an egg that I wasn't going to use—better it be used by someone else than not at all. Some asked me how I would feel knowing that some of my biological material would be out there, questions like, "Wouldn't you want to meet the child one day?" "What if more than one family gets to use your eggs?" "What will you do if the child tracks you down one day?" But no one was negative. So many people, especially at the office, told me "it's a mitzvah."

I think that more women don't follow through [to actually donate] because their initial motivation is financial, and this is not enough to sustain them. For me to go through with donating, it had to become about more than just the money: it was my chance to do something for other people.

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Rebecca underwent the process safely, and was told that between 8-14 of her eggs were harvested for donation. Two years later, her faith in God, karma and her own fertility were justified—Rebecca is now happily married with a healthy baby daughter of her own, and she says she has no regrets.

Initially, I had some fear about its affecting my own ability to have children, but as I went through it I became convinced that if I was doing something good for others, I couldn't be hurt. Because I considered it for so long, I had thought about every consequence of what could happen. Obviously, you never know with any medical procedures—there are always risks. But, like the nine-inch needle I took in the back for an epidural during labor, the benefit outweighs the risk. And, if anything, having my daughter has made me doubly confident I did the right thing.

I'd only recommend egg donation to someone who was sure. I have advised women who were in the early stages of researching the possibility, and I gave them a brutally honest first-person perspective. I told them that egg donation is a tremendous commitment, and takes a toll on your time and body. Because you have to be on the same cycle as the egg recipient—the eggs are harvested and immediately implanted in the recipient—you have to go to the hospital every day, either for blood work or for an ultrasound to monitor your progress. You need to give yourself daily hormone injections, sometimes multiple times a day. But, in my opinion, the most important thing is that you have to truly believe that you are not giving away a child. If you are going to spend the rest of your life looking at children on playgrounds and wondering if it's possible that child could be yours, then perhaps it's not the right choice for you.

People have asked what I would do if, 20 years from now, a child that was biologically half mine tracked me down. But I just can't imagine that any child resulting from an IVF process using my egg would want to track me down. The parents don't know who I am. There may be clinics that don't guarantee anonymity, but in this case, the records are sealed; they're not even computerized. The only way the file could be opened is if it's court-ordered, for example, in the case of a terminal illness. And in that type of extreme scenario, I wouldn't object to being contacted.

I'm already on the bone-marrow registry, so why would helping out in this case be any different?

IV

Why don't more young Jewish women donate their eggs? Rebecca speculates that Jewish parents tend to be more judgmental of unusual choices, and that some single women may fear they are letting their parents down by not producing children of their own. Despite her conviction that she made the right choice, Rebecca still hasn't told her own parents (and therefore requested that LILITH use a pseudonym).

I would really like to tell my parents, and hope to one day. I think they'd see it as a mitzvah, but they'd also be upset about my taking a risk that could have impacted my life and that of their potential grandchildren. [According to the CHR website, www.centerforhumanreprod.com, egg donation does not appear to have any long-term effects on a donor's fertility.] I was also afraid that people in the community wouldn't see this as my personal choice: they would see it as reflecting badly on my parents, that they "let me become poor enough" that I was forced to make this choice.

I told my husband pretty early in our relationship, after about two or three months. I liked to get this announcement out of the way when I was dating, in case it was going to be a problem. But it was something I was proud of, and I hoped he would be too. He later told me that he thought it was amazingly selfless of me. He thought it said a lot about me that I could be that generous. Someday I will tell my daughter, too…when she's old enough to understand the context, and that by donating an egg, I wasn't giving away one of her siblings.

I'm on a bone marrow registry. Why not this?

V

While sperm and embryos can be easily frozen for future use, freezing unfertilized eggs is a more challenging process. Within 10 years, some speculate, women may have the opportunity to freeze their eggs for future implantation.

Still, with the tendency toward late marriage for today's 20- and 30-somethings, these factors combine to create a fertility crisis. However, the crisis can be alleviated through community action and services, and, Rebecca suggests, with more support for egg donation as a choice for Jewish women.

Because donation is something that Jewish women haven't traditionally done, that gives the impression that this is something Jewish women shouldn't do.

Today there are thousands of Jewish couples who cannot have children. By the time that they feel they're ready financially, they start having fertility problems. Young Jewish women who are still young enough to produce viable eggs, even those who have families of their own but who have chosen not to have any more children, may want to consider egg donation. The Jewish community could help in several ways, from providing day care and other helpful services, so couples can choose to have children earlier, to being more accepting, even supportive, of a young Jewish woman's choice to donate her eggs. But this doesn't change the fact that for many couples it's already too late, and the community should be more supportive of them, too.

Though people don't readily talk about it, I don't believe that I'm the only Jewish woman to ever donate eggs. We're always taught the value of pikuah nefesh, of saving a life. But egg donation is giving a life. It shouldn't be such a taboo topic.

Esther D. Kustanowitz is a freelance writer living in New York.

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FLORA

a short story about the inquisition and its aftermath

by Ann Shaftel

Flora's body was lumpy, like dough that had been pounded but not yet formed into a loaf of bread. Black hair that was between curly and frizzy barely brushed her shoulders. Her eyes were black too, and as silent as her voice. No one in Don Francisco Diaz's house had ever heard her speak.

She hardly remembered the first 17 years of her life, though they were not that long ago, and she knew nothing at all of Santo Domingo or the Indies, her home these past months. Some memories were lost through Flora's choice, others because... well...she never could remember things for very long.

She was born in Spain, in the village of Los Reyes, during the reign of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella—not that she knew or cared who sat on her country's throne. She was a peasant, the slow-witted daughter of a widowed sheep-herder.

Flora didn't know she was a Jewess. What business was it of hers that Los Reyes Catolicos had ordered the Holy Office of the Inquisition to stamp out all traces of the religion her people had practiced since the world was new?

A heavy sadness filled the big house that was Flora's home now. Don Francisco's sobs disturbed the edges of her darkness. Flora knew the sound of a soul in pain as well as she knew cleaning and scrubbing. Don Francisco Diaz had rescued her from...

No. She would not remember that.

She raised herself from the straw pallet on which she slept in front of the kitchen hearth. Don Francisco and his wife, Dona Iliana, had offered her a bed, but she preferred to sleep here. A bowl of fresh pears and goat cheese sat on the kitchen table, left for her by Esmeralda, the cook, but Flora was not hungry.

Following the sound of Don Francisco's sadness, she climbed the stairs to Dona Iliana's room.

Her mistress lay still and white on her bed. Flora remembered what death looked like. Don Francisco sat, his shoulders bent, as the physician pulled the sheet over Dona Iliana's face. Esmeralda stood beside the bed, her eyes filled with tears, a newly delivered girl child in her arms.

Flora didn't want any memories, but sometimes they came anyway. There was a lamb once—its mother had died, and Flora had collected milk from a she-goat so the lamb wouldn't die too.

This infant barely moved, barely whimpered as the cook washed and wrapped her in the soft, white blanket Dona Iliana had embroidered for her coming child. Flora had spent many hours in this room, watching Dona Iliana work her needle in and out of that cloth.

Curiosity wrestled with the familiar blackness, and Flora moved next to Esmeralda. She had never been this close to a human baby before. The children of the count on whose land Flora's father, Refugio Rodriguez, had tended his sheep and goats, had all been Flora's age or older.

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The flutter of this baby's thin eyelashes brushed some hidden memory. Flora tried to shut it away, but the baby wouldn't let her. Her soft whimper was like the sound made by one of Father's newborn lambs.

She still remembered her father, sometimes, and the pastures where she used to run when she was a child. Day after day she would listen to him croon his songs to the sheep and lambs that were in his care, and when a sick animal was entrusted to her, she would croon too, the only lines she could remember:

"Up there on the mountain, there goes a shepherd weeping…If I die of this pain, bury me out in the meadow, where no flocks go past."

When the animals got well, Flora ran and played with them, and when they died, she grieved, but only for a little while. She was quickly distracted by Father, or by the other animals.

When they were out in the pasture, Refugio would take his shepherd's stick and draw in the dirt the holy alphabet. Aleph. Bet. Gimmel. Dalet. All her father knew of the old religion, he had told Flora, the one the King and Queen had forbidden, were the sacred marks his father had taught him, the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Patiently, over and over, he would help her draw them until she could draw and name each one herself. Aleph. Bet. Gimmel. Dalet.

"When you want to pray," he had told her, "and you don't remember the words, make the letters. They'll fly straight up to God, and He'll arrange them in the right order."

These letters and the few lines from his songs were all the inheritance Refugio had to pass on to his only child. Every time she drew a letter and named it correctly, he'd get a grin so big Flora was afraid his face would break. Then he'd stretch out his arms and give her his biggest embrace. He warned her, too, that the letters must be their own special secret, and that she must never speak of them to anyone else. Every time she said the name of a letter, she would add, "Secret. Don't tell."

Sometimes Flora was sent to the home of the count to help the old housekeeper with the cleaning and laundry. The old woman was always called, simply, Old Woman. Old Woman taught Flora how to clean and, because she was very strong, Flora could scrub the linens until they were snowy white and the floors until they shone. Once when Flora was walking across the yard carrying a bucket of dirty water from the scrubbing, the count's children began to throw stones at her, to see if she could dodge them. She tripped, spilling the water, then fell down, sitting in a puddle of mud. Old Woman heard her cry out in pain and humiliation, and the other children laughing, and she came running out of the kitchen waving her broom in the air.

"Dirty animals!" she cried at them. "Don't you hurt this girl." Then she took Flora back inside and washed the mud off and comforted her.

From her father, from his animals, and from Old Woman, Flora learned what love was, and she gave love freely to whoever would receive it. On days when the sun shone warm on the hills, she would stretch her arms out wide, just like Father did for her, and bring them in around herself in an embrace that felt as warm as the sun's rays. When she walked, she held her head high, so the sun could kiss her face.

One morning when Flora was in her fifteenth year, she went looking for Refugio in the hills. She found him lying on the ground, his face turned to the side. His eyes were wide open, but Flora could tell he wasn't looking at her. She had seen Father's sheep and goats looking like that sometimes after they had been sick. Flora went running for Old Woman.

"His poor heart just gave out, I suppose," the old housekeeper said tearfully. "He's gone to be with God."

Flora only wished Father would smile at her again, and put his arms around her.

For two years after Refugio died, Flora lived with Old Woman, sleeping on a straw pallet in front of the kitchen hearth. At first she thought often about Father, and was sad, but her memory of him gradually faded, and she didn't think of him so often.

she didn't want any memories, but they came anyway. a baby lamb. a she-goat.

When the old housekeeper became ill, Flora nursed her and crooned her father's song.

"Up there on the mountain, there goes a shepherd weeping." She brewed a tea of the special grasses that helped the sheep when they were sick, and did all of the housekeeper's chores. When Old Woman's fever went higher, Flora bathed her face in cool water and sang to her more loudly and with greater urgency. She remembered that, when Father's sheep got sick, if they didn't get better, they died. Then she remembered that Father, too, had died.

"Please don't die, Old Woman," she had begged. If Old Woman went away, Flora would be alone.

The infant shuddered in Esmeralda's arms, and her tiny body went rigid.

"Oh, no, little one, you mustn't die, too," the cook cried. The physician placed a drop of clear liquid from a glass vial on the baby's lips. She coughed once, then gasped. Her skin took on a bluish tinge. Dr. Morales put his mouth over the child's tiny one, blowing air into her lungs, but the little girl did not respond.

Flora remembered, then, that Father used to trace one of their secret letters on the foreheads of the really sick animals. She wrinkled her forehead, and remembered that it was the letter Pe, all curled up on itself like the petals of a rosebud.

"God lives in the empty space inside this letter," Father had told her, "and He can heal the sick."

Flora's finger moved toward the child's forehead, then drew back. The letters could make something terrible happen—something Flora didn't want to remember.

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The old woman didn't know how to read, but she had seen letters before.

She had drawn a Pe with her finger on Old Woman's forehead, and when her fever broke, Flora wept with relief. When she began to get stronger, Flora wanted to give her a present. The only present she could think of was the special letters Father had taught her. She found a piece of paper and a charcoal pencil and began painstakingly to write down the letters. She made them as perfect as she could, then showed them to Old Woman.

"Look," she said, "Aleph. Bet. Gimmel." Too late, she remembered Father's warning.

"They're secret," she said urgently. "Please, don't tell, Old Woman."

"What are you doing?" the old housekeeper asked, horrified. She didn't know how to read, but she had seen letters before, and they didn't look like these strange markings Flora had made. And the words she used! "This is witchcraft," she said in a low voice that frightened Flora as much as Old Woman herself was frightened.

Old Woman had heard the warnings in Church about witchcraft, and other things that were against the Holy Catholic Faith. I must report her to the Inquisition, she thought. Then she looked at Flora's face and thought of the gentle soul inside. I can't do it, she resolved, even if it means my soul will burn in hell. She threw the letters into the hearth fire. But what if someone else saw the letters? If Flora forgot once, she could forget again. Then she and Flora would both be burned!

There was only one thing, she decided. For Flora's own protection, she must be sent out of Spain. As far as she knew, Flora had no family except Refugio, but she, Juana Cruz Garcia, had a cousin who lived somewhere in North Africa. And, she had a son. He should be out of jail by now. He would arrange Flora's passage.

Baptiste was a good boy, she reminded herself. It was only the jealousy of others that got him in trouble. He was too handsome, too successful with the women. That was why someone had planted those stolen gold pieces in his room.

Indignation rose in Old Woman every time she thought about it. Well, he would come to visit his mother soon. She was due to be paid her poor wages in a few days. Baptiste would need that money to start his life again. He would help Flora.

"You will go with the girl to my cousin, Juan Garcia," said Old Woman as she handed the only thing she had of any value besides her wages, a gold Crucifix, over to her son. "He works for a family named Vanegas, in Alexandria. There, you will be safe from the ones who get you into trouble."

There was a gleam in Baptiste Garcia's eye as he slipped the Crucifix into the folds of his shirt. It would get him to where he wanted to go, but it wasn't Alexandria. The girl would make him a nice profit, too.

"You are a good son," his mother said. "I see how it gives you pleasure to be of service to this poor, unfortunate one."

"Yes, Mama," the young man agreed.

Old Woman kissed Flora on both cheeks and told her, "You will go with my son to a place where you will be safe. Do you understand?"

Flora nodded, but she did not understand—not then, and not during the silent, day-long walk to the port of Barcelona.

At the first galley he saw, Baptiste pulled down Flora's blouse, exposing her breasts for the benefit of the pot-bellied Turkish captain.

"No!" Flora cried, and pulled up her blouse.

Baptiste yanked her hand away and bared the girl's chest again.

"I can let you have her for, say, 300 pesos," Baptiste told the captain.

"You think Ahmet is a fool?" said the captain. "One hundred, and not a single peso more."

"You rob me, but, all right." Baptiste took the bills from the Turk's hand and stuffed them inside his boot. He pinched Flora's cheek and smiled.

"Good-bye, my little flower," he whispered. "You have brought Baptiste a good profit."

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Flora felt alone and confused. Why had Old Woman sent her to this strange place? Why was she left in the charge of this evil-smelling man whose eyebrows shot up like the devils she heard about in Church?

The captain gave Flora a shove in the direction of his overseer, and she was taken below deck and moved onto a rough wooden bench between some other men. An oar was put into her hands.

She said her name once, the way Father had taught her. "I am Flora." Then she felt the sting of a whip on her arm, and heard the order to "Pull oars!" She cried out once, and felt the whip again. This time there was blood on her sleeve. A man next to her showed her how to pull the heavy wooden pole.

Flora had never been whipped before.

Never in her life had she felt so frightened. She had known only the blue skies and fresh air of Los Reyes, and the warm sun on her face. She had never imagined a place as dark and foul smelling as this. The ship kept rolling from side to side and front to back, so she couldn't sit still on the bench. Some of the men were sick, and then Flora got sick, and noone could clean up the vomit because the overseer's whip made them keep rowing.

Why had Old Woman sent her here? to this place? Was it because of the letters? Was she supposed to go to another place? Garcia? Alexandria? She couldn't remember.

She couldn't tell if it was day or night, because it was always dark. When her arms got too tired to row any more, she slept sitting up on the bench. Then some men came and pulled her away from the oars and dragged her up the stairs to the deck of the galley.

For just a minute she saw the blue sky, and she wanted to run over the hills with Father's sheep and goats, but a heavy arm was around her chest, pinning her arms to her sides. She tried to struggle free, but some other men were holding her legs. She could hear them laughing and shouting, but she couldn't see their faces because her head was bent back.

The men were shouting words she didn't understand, and laughing and fighting to get near her. One of them tore her blouse off and grabbed and pulled at her breast, like Father pulled at the teats of his old she-goats to get the last drops of milk. She cried out in pain. Then he began rubbing something else against her breast, something she couldn't see, but was hard and long. She struggled to raise her head, and for just a moment before one of them pushed her down again, she saw. He was like a goat in rut. They were all goat-men! She felt something wet and sticky spill all over her. They were making her dirty.

She yelled "NO!" and one of the men yelled, and the others laughed even harder, and then the men started pulling off her clothes. She tried to fight, but one of them hit her in the mouth, and when she tried to kick, another grabbed her foot and twisted it. Then they pulled off her underclothes.

"NO!" she screamed again. This time the scream came up from her belly and reverberated all over the ship. But the men kept coming at her, rubbing their goat things and spilling their sticky wetness inside of her and all over her. And she hurt—she hurt so horribly!

The screams kept coming, terrible, animal screams, up from the bottom of her soul. Then one of them blocked the sound by putting his hard goat thing into her mouth and down her throat. And then the blackness came.

Somewhere in a hidden corner of her mind was a memory of a lamb that wouldn't get well, no matter how much Flora cared for it. And when it lay unmoving, its eyes unblinking, its flesh unresponding to Flora's touch, Father had said, "The lamb doesn't feel anything now. Nothing can hurt it."

In that same corner of Flora's mind, a decision was made. She would be like that lamb.

Francisco Diaz was a prosperous merchant in Santo Domingo. He also worked for an organization of secret Jews that ransomed captives who were sold into slavery while escaping the Spanish Inquisition. He first saw the strange, silent girl bare-breasted on the auction block in Madeira. He purchased her freedom, and gently laid his own coat over her to cover her nakedness. Another of the newly freed galley wretches told him the girl's name was Flora.

A light breeze blew in and lifted a corner of the blanket in which the child was wrapped. Flora saw the white rosebud Dona Iliana had embroidered there, and when she saw the Hebrew Pe that the mistress had enfolded in its petals, her body grew stiff. More memories came creeping back. A kid she had watched being born, taking its first steps on shaking legs, too close to the edge of a cliff. Flora had run after the kid, had fallen down to grasp its feet and pull it back where the ground was flat. This little one needed to be pulled back, too.

Flora shook her head, wanting to stay in her darkness, but then she heard her father's voice.

"God lives in the empty space inside the letter. He can heal the sick."

A little bit of the child's blue-tinged forehead showed beneath that corner of the blanket. Flora reached toward her and slowly, fearfully, traced the letter on her forehead.

The child gave a soft cry. Don Francisco turned toward the sound, and the hope that was in that cry. The blue color left the baby's skin, and she began to turn pink.

Dr. Morales put his ear to the baby's chest. "She has a small chance," he said, "with the right care."

Don Francisco held out his arms, and Esmeralda placed the baby in them. With tears of joy, he held the infant to his face and kissed her fragile cheek.

"Welcome, my daughter," he said softly. Then, smiling, he placed the baby in Flora's outstretched arms. "You have a gift," he said.

Flora smiled too, for the first time since she had been in this house. She lifted the frail creature to her lips and, in a voice low enough to be heard only inches away, began to croon, "Up there on the mountain, there goes a shepherd weeping."

Ann Shaftel retired after a 31-year career teaching English, social studies and parenting in a school for pregnant teens in Los Angeles. She has completed one novel and is at work on several others.

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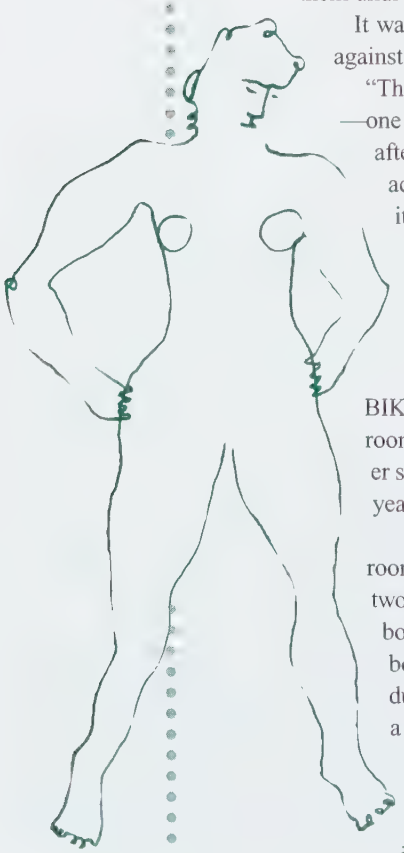
Teenage girls who like their bodies? *Get out!!*

by Anna Schnur-Fishman

Not long ago some summer-camp girlfriends and I had a sleepover, and at about 3 AM, after we'd exhausted the topics of cute guys and the new 2005 SATs, the talk turned to our 16-year-old bodies: thighs, bellies, hair, boobs, booties. Did we like them? Did Jess wish she had Nomi's legs, did Maggie covet Natasha's complexion? Did we hate changing in the school locker rooms, did we plotz at the thought of being seen in our bikinis?

Sprawled out on sleeping bags, munching on mini-marshmallows and Cheese Doodles, we were somewhat surprised to find out that we all shared a similar sentiment: We felt fine about our bodies. Sure, Natasha confided, she wished her "boobs were more symmetrical," and Maggie, that she had "less hairy upper-inner thighs," but in a hierarchy of things that obsessed us, these issues fell fairly low on the list. We looked, we all agreed, "good enough" for the locker rooms; and at the beach? well, chicken legs, love handles, flat chests…they were just what we'd been dealt.

We knew that this level of body acceptance was very different from that of most teenage girls. America's consumerist culture, after all—the vast self-improvement aisles at CVS, women's magazines that promise, month after month, six or eight or 10 steps to a perfect butt, our society's fixation on Hollywood looks—all seem almost intended to make girls feel like shit. Each one of us knew girls who stuck to mineral water while the rest of us split Chinese food, who passed up incredible class trips because the thought of someone seeing them undressed or without make-up flipped them out.



It was clear to us that our summer camp's overall culture had, to some extent, immunized us against this teen epidemic of body-loathing, but how?

"The BIK," Toni said, referring to our camp's communal bathhouse, a plain concrete building —one side for girls, the other for boys—where we all (campers, counselors, assorted others) day after day, and summer after summer, showered naked with each other. "BIK" is a Hebrew acronym for bait keesay ("house of the chair"), a euphemism for bathroom, and ours—with its no-frills shower rooms—wasn't anything to write home about. There is the pipe missing its shower head (called the "penis shower," because water plops out of it directly in a sturdy stream) and dozens of bottles of shampoo, conditioner and body wash, brought by individuals, but intended for use by the collective, strewn over a couple of wooden shelves and the slightly slimy floor.

Early in the morning or late at night there might be only two or three showerers in the BIK, but at rush hours like right before shabbat or just after swim, there's hardly standing room. The building is intended for use by campers 12 or 13 and older, but, as the single-shower stalls in the younger kids' tzrifim (bunks) inevitably break and flood, the eight- through 11-year-olds often use the BIK regularly, too.

In the BIK, a 10-year-old camper rinsing off after swim might suddenly find herself in a room full of naked singing 15-year-olds and counselors—and maybe a nurse or lifeguard or two—every one of them exhibiting an impressive ease with exposing their differently shaped boobs and tushes. Younger girls eavesdropped on older girls' discussions about their boyfriends, separated parents, what colleges they liked, whether or not Stacey was right to dump Ben; they wondered whether you could use a tampon if you were still a virgin, what a "speculum" was, and how, exactly, the 18-year-old arts-and-crafts teacher made what she called "reusable sanitary napkins."

"It's like the Great Equalizer," said Toni through a mouthful of Cheerios, "a place where you see all these differently shaped bodies that make you realize how ridiculous it would be to spend every minute of every day miserable about how you look."

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"And when you're eight or 10 or 12," someone else chimed in, "and you see all the older girls you completely idolize having very not ideal bodies, but they're singing and chatting and doing the naked Hokey-Pokey, discussing, like, what kind of potato chip they like, you see that they're one hundred percent comfortable being naked, and you want to have that comfort, too."

"You wouldn't think capitalism creates negative feelings about showering naked," Rachel said, shlepping in the requisite p.c. lingo from our left-leaning camp to sum it all up, "but it does."

The lessons we learned at the BIK are profound (and extremely counter-cultural). Here are six properties that I think made the BIK work for us:

First, it requires an initial leap of faith. When a girl first steps into the BIK naked (a lot of girls start out showering in their bathing suits, and then there's that day when they "take it all off"), it's scary. You have to pretend you feel fine when you really don't, hoping that pretending turns into the real thing. (It does.) Sonia Isard, 19, says, "I was 10. I remember thinking, 'Are they gonna know it's my first time?' They were all standing around naked, chatting like it was normal. I felt proud. It was a bravery thing, too. I was testing myself."

Says Naomi Rosen, 17, "I remember where I was standing. I began with my bathing suit halfway down but then, finally, I just took the whole thing off. Everyone was saying, 'Way to go, Naomi!" and I got a big applause. It's a hard thing to do, but we all do it."

Second, there's a culture of support. The larger culture makes you feel inadequate, and the truth is that the constant competition is exhausting. The BIK is a relief from that. Everyone who steps into the BIK is affirming an implicit covenant: We support one another. Being naked was (or is) difficult for every single one of us—and that creates a feeling of safety.

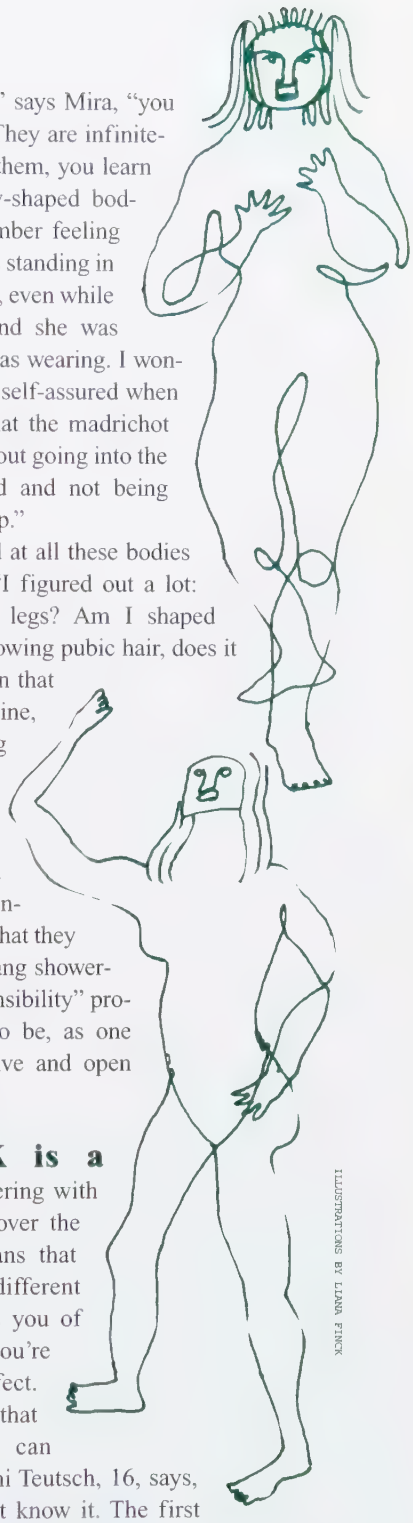
Mira Shore, 15, says, "Society tells you to only be naked when you're alone, because you should be embarrassed about your body." It's only the willed force of our entire group that allows us to overcome that voice. "I don't jump to take off my clothes in front of my school friends—it's different in the BIK," says Toni Hellmann, 16. "There you are in the shower and you're finished getting clean," Naomi says, "but you just stand there, because it feels so great and you feel free. That's where you become comfortable with yourself, in front of other women."

Third, it's multi-generational. The larger culture that young people live in is pretty age-segregated, so the eight- to 25-year-old population of the BIK is unique. "You're ageless in the shower," says Toni. "Because there's a variety of ages, there's such a wide range of bodies and of development that you can't be abnormal."

"When you're younger," says Mira, "you look up to the older girls. They are infinitely cool. Because you love them, you learn to like all their differently-shaped bodies." Adds Sonia, "I remember feeling that someone I idolized was standing in front of me, naked, exposed, even while standing on a pedestal, and she was wearing the same thing I was wearing. I wondered, 'Can I really be that self-assured when I'm 19?'" Says Toni, "What the madrichot [counselors] showed me about going into the BIK and showering naked and not being afraid, it helped me grow up."

"Just by looking around at all these bodies in the BIK," Sonia says, "I figured out a lot: How do you shave your legs? Am I shaped funny?" When you start growing pubic hair, does it look weird? And, a question that most of us had at eight or nine, what is that string dangling between some girls' legs?

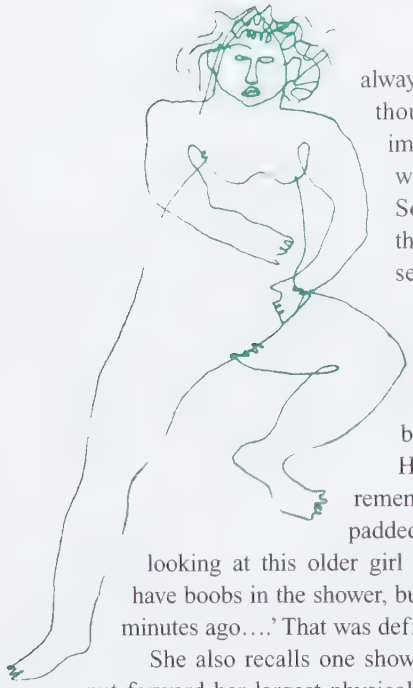
In the end, being able to identify with older females is a source of pride. The older girls and counselors, for their part, know that they are role-models for the young showerers, and having that "responsibility" provides a potent incentive to be, as one counselor told me, "positive and open and free about our bodies."



ILLUSTRATIONS BY LILAN PINK

Fourth, the BIK is a reality check. Showering with dozens of other females over the course of a summer means that you see bodies of all different shapes and sizes. It cures you of the oppressive belief that you're the only one who is imperfect. "On some level, you know that not everyone 'beautiful' can have the same body," Nomi Teutsch, 16, says, "but on another, you don't know it. The first time I showered in the BIK, seeing older girls who I had

We learned a profound lesson in that shower.



always considered really pretty, I thought, 'That's not what I imagined someone attractive would look like.'" Says Sonia, "There was something very important about seeing physical flaws and imperfections on women who I knew were beautiful, and who I knew everyone else knew were beautiful."

Hannah Waters, 16, says, "I remember when I figured out how padded bras work, because I was looking at this older girl and thinking, 'She doesn't have boobs in the shower, but she did in real life fifteen minutes ago….' That was definitely good to know."

She also recalls one shower during which every girl put forward her largest physical insecurity. Hannah's overwhelming memory is that she hadn't noticed any of these things—a mole on the backside of someone's ear, different-colored nipples, a faint unibrow. "It suddenly occurred to me that the things I obsessed about, other people weren't noticing about me, either."

Fifth, it's pushing back against American culture. It's unbelievable—and tragic—to realize that it's actually subversive for females to feel okay about their bodies, to take back our right to feel even adequate.

"Being naked," says Sonia, "felt like a strong 'fuck you' to everything: to myself, the media, the patriarchy, capitalism, girls I was jealous of, boys I had liked but never kissed, heterosexism, big ugly boys who had teased me in kindergarten. I guess it was a big 'fuck you' because I knew I was bucking the system just a little bit. It was a battle cry."

The "fuck you" is also, as Sonia recognizes, aimed at our internalized self-critical voice, the part of ourselves that we have to whack at again and again as if weeding a garden. "In the shower," says Sonia, "that voice went away and I heard my own voice. And it made me feel…sexy!"

Bucking the system makes us feel empowered. It also makes us feel naughty. As one of my friends said, "We should be arrested for feeling this good about ourselves."

We should be arrested for feeling this good about ourselves.

Sixth, it's joyful! When you're naked in the shower and your whole self is out there for everyone to see, you basically have nothing more to lose. You can regress to the years before you learned to feel insecure about your body and, like a toddler, just enjoy the opportunity to run around nude.

"I'm naked and I'm doing rikud [Israeli folk-dancing] in the shower! It makes dancing Yoya that much more exciting," Sonia says.

While we soap up or rinse ourselves off, we sing "Od Yavo Shalom Aleinu," switching showerheads at every chorus of "Salaaaam…!" We claim a right to the traditional male sport of long-distance spitting, aiming for a friend's bellybutton or nipple or left ear across the room. Pronouncing, "L'chaim!" ("To life!"), we toss our chests into the air as a carefree toast to sisterhood and all the large, medium, small, saggy, perky, even, lopsided breasts it embraces. It's pure liberation.

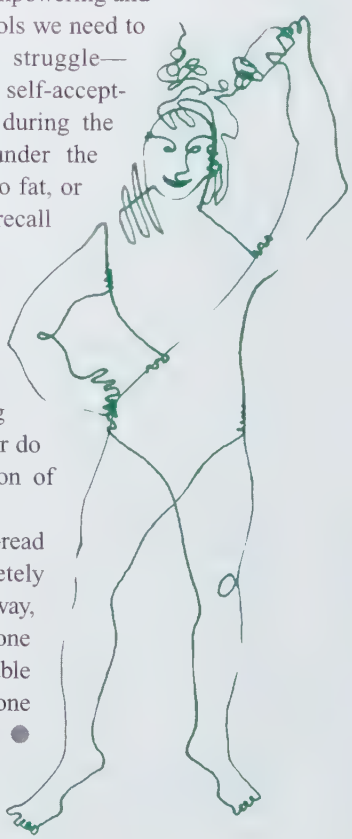
One girl remembers a hysterical BIK discussion about who could be recognized by her breasts alone; another recalls a conversation during which each showerer was provided, free of charge, with a general verdict regarding which of her two breasts was the larger (when else would you ever talk about this?)—because, of course, you can't tell on your own.

Hannah remembers one time during the school year that four girls and one guy got together for the day. "We made him wait in Ilana's bedroom while the four of us squished into her shower. You learn a lot in the BIK, but when the summer is over, what you miss the most is just having fun."

Can you "take the BIK home" with you? Showering in the BIK is affirming, empowering and fun, and it gives us the tools we need to keep working at the ongoing struggle—against the general culture, for self-acceptance. The greatest challenge is during the winter months, when, lonely under the shower head, you begin to feel too fat, or too flat, and you have to work to recall the lessons of the BIK.

For Rachel Mahler, 15, the best part is coming home from camp. "The thing I love so much about the BIK is telling my school friends about it, and having them say, 'You know, I could never do that.' The feeling is a combination of pride and gratitude."

Ends Toni, "At home I try to spread the BIK just by being completely accepting of people—in every way, but especially physically. Everyone has the potential to be comfortable with their bodies, but not everyone has the privilege." ●



Anna Schnur-Fishman is a senior at Boston Latin School.

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A Reminder of How Unusual this Girls-Shower Culture Really Is

Joan Jacobs Brumberg, professor of history at Cornell University and author of The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls and Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa (Harvard 1988), spoke recently with former LILITH intern **Ilana Kramer** about young Jewish girls and the uneasiness so many of them feel about their bodies.

In The Body Project, I talk about the ways certain appearance issues could generate anxiety in specific ethnic groups; [for example] concerns about skin had different meaning for Jewish girls and Afro-American girls because of cultural stereotypes. There is this notion of "dirty Jews" in the 20th Century. So, for example, something like acne was associated with dirt. It generated a lot of concern among Jewish girls because of the association. Early on a lot of Jewish girls in adolescence were going to dermatologists, even though their socio-economic status was not ample enough.

We need to consider the way ethnic groups and class drive preoccupations in girls. We're not a culture that encourages a great deal of heterogeneity in our beauty ideal.

I think a lot of Jewish young women feel the struggle to be beautiful is an uphill battle, because our genetic heritage, in many cases, does not match the cultural ideal.

Girls [in general] are dealing with the fact that girl culture is not always kind or cooperative, the way it seems to have been in the past. Girls in the 19th century had a much different relationship to their peer group back then. There was an intergenerational group, and much more contact with older women besides your mother.

I think that all girls today are dealing with complications of opportunity and greater educational equity. Girls now are competing for the same things that boys are competing for, as well as maintaining that very conventional hetero-competition for popularity and boys. And now there's an added pressure to have a perfect body. ●

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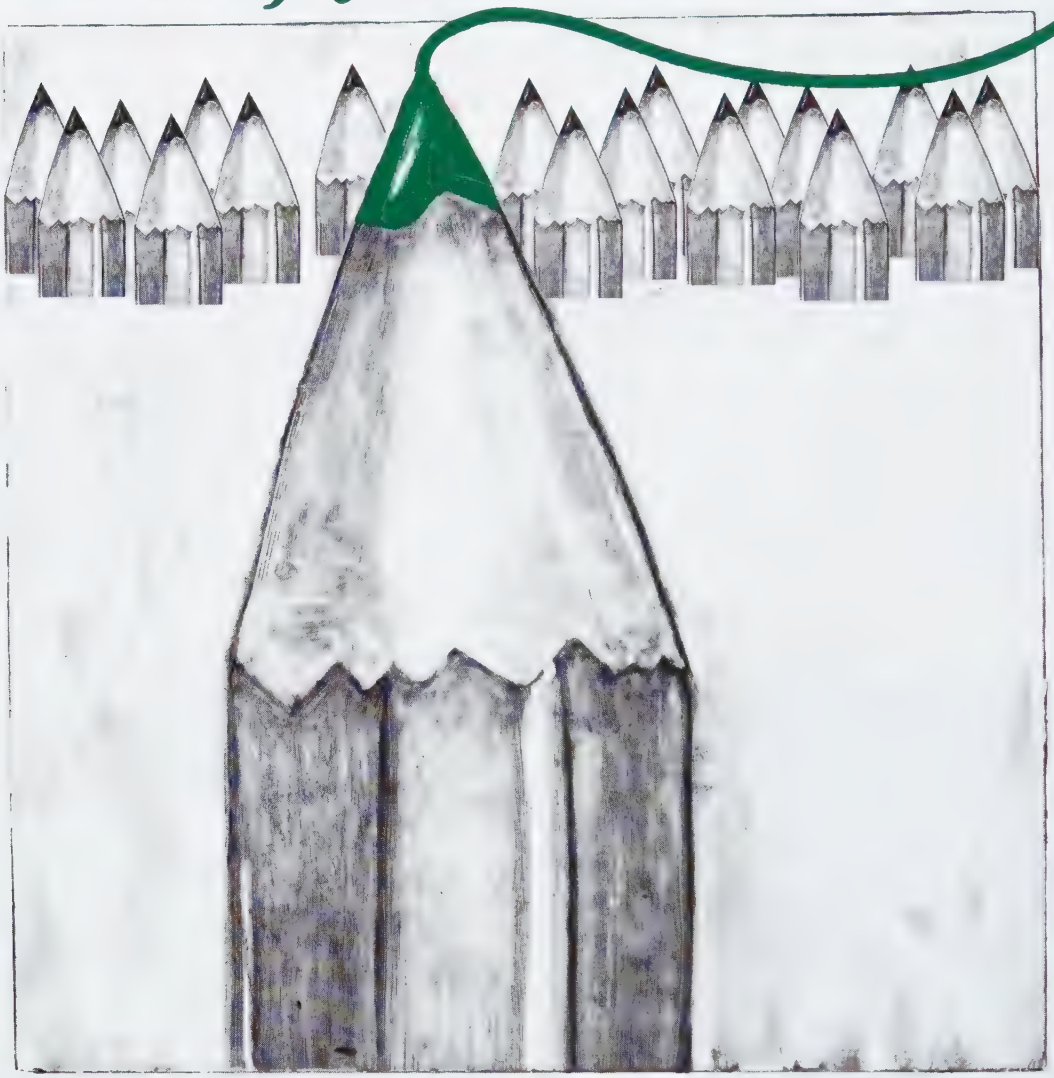
Lilith's annual Jewish feminist look at books for young readers

Writing from the Outside



We are living in a time of what may seem like necessary xenophobia, where strangers, or—more pointedly—strange people, are to be feared, shunned, rejected. Jews know about this: "Because you were strangers in the Land of Egypt" is a leitmotif in the Jewish narrative. Women know about this. We've been "other" when the norm has been male. And in the hierarchical world of children who's in and who's out packs ever more fire power. So this year, for our annual spotlight on books for young readers we asked a number of writers: Are there ways you personally have experienced "outsider" status? Have outsider/insider experiences as a Jew and/or as a person sensitive to gender issues influenced your writing? Do particular books from your own youth stand out as illuminating this continuum from alienation to feeling fully included?

—Naomi Danis

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Lore Segal

An Indigestible Childhood

If our theme is Writing from the Outside, I'm your poster child. My first book novelized my escape from Hitler's Vienna and a childhood in England, living in, as the title had it, Other People's Houses. An Austrian reader guiltily confessed to me that she had caught herself laughing at the funny parts.

Most of my writing returns, willy-nilly, to that old history. Why doesn't it turn up in my children's books?

I was surprised to learn that my book, Tell Me a Mitzi, written in 1970 for my own children—was understood to have a political element. Little Mitzi's enterprise in getting her baby brother, Jacob, out of his crib, changed, fed, and into a taxi to visit the grandparents, got her invited for inclusion in Free to Be...You and Me if I could advance her traditionally feminine skills to, say, fixing a wheel on the stroller. I couldn't, wouldn't—a decision that seems to me, at this remove, at once principled and silly.

We don't choose the plots of our stories, just as we don't choose our dreams. So what does it mean when Mitzi, sitting in that taxi, doesn't know the grandparents' address? In another story Mitzi brings the presidential motorcade to full stop, but it has, eventually, to move on, move out of sight. The book's last words are Jacob saying, "All gone." In the sequel, Tell Me a Trudy, Superman, having decimated the robbers behind the bathroom curtain, flies out the window, and Trudy's last words, too, are "All gone."

Am I telling the children something learned in my old, indigestible childhood?—that things don't work out the way you think; that some of our enterprises end on a falling note; all of them end, but there are the funny parts to make you laugh? And I would defend telling children that the world is full of disasters and funny parts.

Lore Segal is a novelist, translator and essayist, and writes books for children. The latest are *Morris the Artist* (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux 2003) and *Why Mole Shouted* (2004).

Michelle Edwards

A Jew amid the Alien Corn

MICHELLE EDWARDS

Nothing in my early life could have prepared me for what it is like to be a Jew living in the Midwest, in an endless expanse of Christianity.

Remember the scene in "Annie Hall" where Alvie Singer (Woody Allen) is eating dinner with Annie's family in Chippewa Falls (not far from St. Paul, Minnesota (where I lived for 16 years)? Annie's grandmother looks over at Alvie, and he immediately envisions himself as she sees him: a bearded black Hasid, a real Jew.

> I tried to act silly, to undo my image of braininess.
>
> —Fran Klagsbrun

When I lived in St. Paul, many, many times I could see myself as I thought I was being seen: a real Jew—too loud, too liberal, dark and foreign.

I live in Iowa City now. No one here has asked me what parish we belong to. No one asks my husband, Rody, what his Christian name is. Iowa City is a small, sophisticated university town, the Athens of the Midwest. In this friendly, neighborly place, there is a sizable Jewish community. Why even the Lubavitcher are here.

But Iowa's small towns are so Christian that living there would mean sinking into the cornfields and leaving behind all traces of a Jewish identity.

Living in the country is like the ubiquitous ham and cheese sandwich, always being offered, always on the menu, always a subject of inquiry when refused. It is comfort food for the natives, forbidden fruit for the strangers.

Michelle Edwards (www.michelledwards.com) is the author/illustrator of *Chicken Man* and the *Jackson Friends* series. Her newest books are *Papa's Latkes* (Candlewick, 2004) and *Stinky Stern Forever* (Harcourt, 2005). Knitters will find her articles at www.knitty.com

Barbara Feinberg

The Hobo Book Exchange

One cold afternoon when I was eleven, my mother met me in our lobby—I remember the cozy heat—and showed me a newspaper. My father's book was number one on the bestseller list. A burst of money fell from the sky. We moved to a formal, white house in Connecticut.

I did poorly in my new school. (Old habits die hard.) To help me improve, my parents sent me to a stately private school. Blonde girls roamed. One day, still new, I met a girl named Serena, who said, "We've never met a Jewish person before." She didn't say this unkindly, only to inform me.

I had never met anyone named Serena before. Or named Hillary, or Bootsie for that matter. (I only knew Marilyn, Lori, Devorah.) I had never been given a hockey stick before. Out on the field I swung my hair—not my stick, I never learned to play—and pretended I was one of them.

But I continued never doing my schoolwork. Occasionally I opened our textbook, and studied the delicate rendering of pearls and netting and lace encircling the necks of queens. But in their smug countenances I read: "Jews are not our kind." There was to be a Christmas play, for which we spent hours learning songs. I sang wholeheartedly, although in truth I only

> I had half-siblings, and there was divorce in my mom's background...
> —Deborah Heiligman

mouthed the words. Eventually, I was kicked out of school. My parents threw up their hands.

There were lots of runaways then, it seemed; this was 1971. We met on trains. We recognized each other. Like hobos who exchange important tips, we tipped each other off about books. I had brought some books with me, and people gave me books. A Crock of Gold, by James Stephens; An Episode of Sparrows by Rumor Godden; Narcissus and Goldmund by Hermann Hesse; A Spy in the House of Love, by Anaïs Nin. Whenever someone told me "I loved this book" and pulled it out of a knapsack, I would study it—perhaps it had important information within. The trains rolled on. I held the books close. They felt beautiful, golden. I had the feeling that the books might form a constellation—that they might light my way home—wherever that was.

Barbara Feinberg originated and runs a creative arts program for children (ages 3-14) called Story Shop, in existence since 1993. She is the author of *Welcome to Lizard Motel: Children, Stories, and the Mystery of Making Things Up: A Memoir* (Beacon Press, 2004).

Deborah Heiligman

Politics Make Her a Stranger

As a kid, I often felt different. I had good friends, a loving family, and a Jewish community in Allentown, Pennsylvania. But back in 1968, having parents with gray hair was enough to make a ten-year-old feel very "other." Then, too, I had half-siblings, and there was divorce in my mother's background. (I was always afraid somebody would make a comment about my "grandparents" or about divorce. They usually did.)

When I reached my teens, I had other reasons to feel alien. I was a budding feminist and a strong girl. I thought about things I didn't think anyone else did. I read Ayn Rand and Our Bodies, Ourselves. And I loved novels about outsiders. I wanted those novels to have happy endings—not that the heroine should change; but that someone would love her for who she was.

As I moved out into the world, in college and beyond, I surrounded myself with like-minded people. I went through a wonderful period of time—my twenties—when I didn't feel like a stranger in a strange land. And, smart girl that I am, I married someone who loved me for who I was.

But in our 30s, tired of lugging a baby stroller up four flights of stairs, and having the freedom of independent writers, my husband and I moved out of New York City to Bucks County, PA. I thought we were moving to an artistic area. An area of like-minded liberals and feminists. Imagine my shock when, at my first neighborhood party, I made a derogatory comment about Oliver North, and the entire crowd went silent. Not only were we the only Jews in the neighborhood, it seemed we were the only Democrats as well. Not since I was a teenager had I felt so much like an outsider. I still often feel like a stranger here, especially around political issues. I try to channel those uncomfortable feelings into my writing.

In my short story "Ritual Purity," I examine what it would be like to be a troubled teenager, raised without religion, living in an Orthodox Jewish community. Whether in a book for young kids about being afraid to swim when everyone else can, or in a scary story about "perfect children," my feeling different informs my fiction. When I write biographies, I am drawn to people who have had the courage to be different as I, mostly, have not.

Deborah Heiligman's most recent book is *High Hopes: A Photobiography of John F. Kennedy* (National Geographic). "Ritual Purity," in the collection *Don't Cramp My Style: Stories About That Time of the Month* (Simon & Schuster, 2004), is her first fiction for teenagers.

Francine Klagsbrun

The Shame of Being Smart

I was lucky. I grew up in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood and attended a small all-girls Hebrew day school, where the teachers valued their students. I never saw myself as a stranger in that land.

My luck changed when I entered a large, public high school. In this world, I discovered, girls weren't supposed to be too smart, and certainly not smarter than the boys around them. I had boy friends whom I helped with homework, but I had no "boyfriends." Judging from photos of myself back then, I was pretty enough, but the boys I knew preferred cute and flirty girls to bookworms like me.

In my senior year I was nominated for "class genius." Instead of feeling proud, I felt shamed. I knew such a title would make me more of an outsider than ever. So I tried to act dumb and silly, to undo my image of braininess. I lost the election. The boy who won had much lower grades than I, but a lot more self-confidence.

I cannot draw a straight line between those painful high school years and my writing today. The world has changed greatly, and women's intellectual achievements are held in much higher regard now. Still, I never take that regard for granted. In everything I write, whether about sibling relationships in adult life or the Sabbath, I make a point of highlighting women's knowledge and viewpoints.

Although growing up I loved "girl books," like Little Women and the Nancy Drew mysteries, I had a special male hero also. He was The Scarlet Pimpernel, an outsider, who through his smarts outwitted extremists after the French Revolution. I admired his daring and dedication to what he believed to be right, no matter what others thought. His adventures inspired me.

Francine Klagsbrun is the author most recently of *The Fourth Commandment.* She is a regular columnist for the New York Jewish Week and Moment magazine. She was editor of the best-selling *Free To Be...You and Me.*

Sylvie Weil

Inventing Rashi's Granddaughter

I was born into a family who, during the Second World War, had indeed become "strangers" in the land of France. After the war, my family returned to France, as did many French Jews.

Growing up in Paris during the fifties, attending one of the best girls' lycées, I did not, most of the time, feel like an outsider. However, I certainly remember being upset when, at age ten, I was the only girl in the class not invited to a birthday party because the girl's mother did not "want any Jews in her house." But I had read the Diary of Anne Frank so many times I practically knew it by heart. What was a birthday party compared to her fate? In later years, there were sporadic negative comments on my (Jewish) physique, vague threats ("You people will soon be wearing the yellow star again") or, once, pictures of Auschwitz passed to me during class. Most often, classmates would just remark that I was not "like them." This upset me, but also made me proud.

There was not just the Shoah, there was the Resistance. I liked to think that I would have fought in the Resistance, as several relatives of mine, men and women, had done.

Unfortunately, I did not grow up with any other positive identification with Judaism. My family did not practice Judaism, the case with many Jewish families after the war. I began my Jewish studies very late, in New York. I discovered Rashi, the master and guide for any person who studies Torah, at any level. I soon became curious about his world, which happened to be France!

I first wrote a novel about Rashi for adults. Then, reluctant to leave behind the world of medieval Judaism, which fascinated me, I decide to write about Rashi's granddaughter. Nothing is known about her, apart from her name. But it was easy for me to identify with her: she was the granddaughter of the Great Commentator, and he had educated her. My father, an academic famous in his field, had also wanted me to receive exactly the same education he would have given a boy.

I transposed situations of my own youth (in school and in the rather "medieval" village where I spent my holidays) to medieval Troyes and Elvina's neighborhood. I imagined my young heroine passionate about learning, constantly surrounded by a group of friends, impulsive, generous, somewhat daring and unconventional, yet bound by tradition, within family and community. Dreaming up Elvina, I was really becoming once again the girl I had been, and placing this girl in a new setting: medieval France at the time of the First Crusade.

Novelist **Sylvie Weil** has taught French literature in France and in the U. S., most recently at Hunter College, New York. Her three novels about Elvina, granddaughter of Solomon ben Isaac, have been well received in France, even in non-Jewish milieux. The first novel, translated as *My Guardian Angel* (Scholastic, 2004), received the Prix Sorcières, which is the French Newbery Award.

Miriam Stone

Writing to Become Whole

My mother died when I was in high school. I felt like an outsider because none of my friends had experienced death up close. We were carefree teenagers; death was something very far from us. I wanted to be normal—to go out and party, have fun and not feel this incredible weight within me. But I had been somewhere that I couldn't explain to anyone, let alone myself.

From Dad Runs Away with the Circus by Etgar Keret, illustrated by Rutu Modan, translated from the Hebrew by Noah Stollman (Candlewick 2004)

One family tolerates a father's journey to the outside and welcomes him home again. Author Etgar Keret says "When I was seven my dad left home for three months, with my permission, to follow his childhood dream of traveling by car from Greece to Iceland. I tried to write the book as a complete outsider, but was constantly sucked into it. Often when I write I find myself creating a kind of an irony-empathy cocktail which, for me, is the best way to describe life (at least the one that I am living)."

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"I will not be divided from her or from myself/ By myths of separation." This is a line by Adrienne Rich and the epitaph for my book, At the End of Words. Writing it was a way for me to reconcile my desire to live my life as a "normal person" and stop feeling the pain of separation from my mother, but to not forget about her at the same time. But if remembering someone is painful, that's a very hard thing to do.

> My mother died when I was in high school. I felt like an outsider because none of my friends had experienced death up close. —Miriam Stone

I tried to do the college student thing—go to class, go to parties, hang out in the dorms—but I felt underneath that something was very wrong. It would surface now and then and I would feel like I was going crazy. I couldn't integrate into my every day life the deep feelings inside of me—those of missing my mother and of knowing in some small way that death is real—without feeling that I would be sucked into a black hole of depression and would become even more separate from myself, my life and my friends.

Writing the book helped me to bring those conflicting elements together under the same roof, to live with all of them within me. I realize now that by living, by breathing and by writing, I am carrying my mother with me; she (and her death) are as much a part of me as any other aspect of my life. Writing was how I became whole again.

Miriam Stone is the author of *At the End of Words: A Daughter's Memoir* (Candlewick), winner of the 2004 International Reading Association Children's Book Award in Young Adult Nonfiction. She lives in Brooklyn, where she works as freelance writer and editor, contributing often to LILITH, and is completing a novel.

Ellen Kushner

Growing Up Weird

So I wasn't like the other kids. I always thought it was because we were Jewish. That was the usual excuse: we don't eat lobster because…we're Jewish. We don't go to school on Sukkot because…we're Jewish.

I was definitely Jewish. I went to Hebrew school, and to services.

But wherever I went, I was never like anyone else. I liked pretending to be other people, and dressing up in costumes. I liked reading the Narnia books and The Lord of the Rings and Joan Aiken. The many ways I was different all got mixed up in my head, and when other kids were rotten to me, or I felt like I didn't really belong, I figured being a Weird Kid had something to do with being Jewish and something to do with liking to write poems and plays. "Oh, you're so creative," they'd say at both schools, which was a way, I thought, of making sure I knew I wasn't like them—not quite an insult, but not exactly a warm cuddly.

I wouldn't have believed, then, that my very "weirdness" was what would let me grow up to write novels and have my own public radio show. I was just too weird, right?

I still can't separate my being an artist from my being a Jew, though.

Nowadays, in America, you can choose to be Jewish and "normal." But for centuries, people couldn't. To be a Jew was automatically to be the Weird Kid, whether we liked it or not. The radical dietary and social restrictions of Jewishness, coupled with the fact that the locals didn't like difference, meant we had no choice. And, like lots of Weird Kids, some Jews got to be the artists, the thinkers, the activists who wound up changing the world.

Now we have a choice… but:

I think a Jew who buys into bland American normality is losing something. The alternativeness of Jewishness can give you something special, that insight into being Not Like the Others. I hate to see us give that up. Being like everyone else is not all it's cracked up to be.

Ellen Kushner is the host of Public Radio International's "Sound & Spirit," an award-winning weekly show that explores music and beliefs around the world. She is the author of three novels, including *Thomas the Rhymer,* which, while published for adults, was a New York Public Library recommended "Book for the Teen Age."

James Howe

Different from Other Boys

As a boy in the 1950s, my life had more than a passing resemblance to the Norman Rockwell covers of the Saturday Evening Post. White, middle-class, Christian, a member of the Cub Scouts and captain of the Safety Patrol, I was the epitome of small-town, white-bread, mainstream American life.

Except that I wasn't. I was different from other boys—a dreamer who liked to play with dolls more than trucks. These differences made me an outsider and a target for name-calling and bullying. Luckily, within my family I was loved and accepted for who I was.

This acceptance was no small thing in an era of such extreme social and political conformity. It helped having a father who was a liberal minister and outspoken social activist. From him, I learned to speak out for what I believe. But the taunts of my peers taught me lessons as well—to be wary of being seen as an outsider, to hold tight to my insider status.

It wasn't until I was 32, and converted to Judaism, that I had a taste of what it was like to live openly as an outsider. My first wife, Debbie, with whom I wrote Bunnicula, was Jewish, but that wasn't why I converted. It was because I found myself at a complete loss for meaning in the face of Debbie's diagnosis of terminal cancer at the age of 31.

Helga Weissová, Birthday Wish I. This drawing features well-dressed children bringing an enormous cake on a hearse from Prague to Terezin. "The most precious gift was food," wrote Weissová. From Art Against the Odds, by Susan Goldman Rubin (Crown Publishing New York, 2004).

Facing the death of the person I loved most in the world, I turned to religion. When I told an older Jewish woman I was going to convert, she said, "Don't you have enough tsuris already?" I began to see what she was getting at when confronted with the assumptions of others that I shared their Christianity. Where did I go to church? Was I spending Christmas with my family? I now had to say, "I don't go to church." "I don't celebrate Christmas." "I'm Jewish." I'm not proud to say it, but it wasn't always easy proclaiming myself an outsider.

And then, almost 20 years later, I proclaimed myself an outsider again, giving up a majority position I'd held—outwardly, at least—my entire life. After 16 years in a second marriage, I came out as a gay man, reclaiming that little boy who loved to play with dolls, refusing to believe the taunts that equated "different" with "less than," standing up to the bullies at last. This time there was tsuris for sure, and sadness, but there was also relief—and deep happiness to be myself, fully.

Before one can feel like an insider in the world, one has to feel like an insider inside oneself. In books like the Pinky and Rex series, Horace and Morris but Mostly Dolores, I Wish I Were a Butterfly, and The Misfits, I say to my readers what the author of one of my favorite childhood books said to me: that it is good and necessary to find your own way, to be yourself. Only then will you be happy.

The book? Munro Leaf's The Story of Ferdinand, which has been continuously in print for almost 70 years. I guess the story of the little bull who refused to fight like the other bulls, but only wanted to sit under his favorite cork tree and quietly smell the flowers, still has something powerful to say. Perhaps it's in the last four words of the story: "He is very happy."

James Howe has written over 70 books for children. *The Misfits* (Atheneum 2001) is a novel about seventh-grade friends who mount a political campaign to end name-calling in their middle school. *Kaddish for Grandpa in Jesus' name amen*, (Atheneum, 2004) is a picture book about a young girl's observance of her grandfather's death in two religious traditions.

Susan Goldman Rubin

Uptown Jews, Downtown Jews

I grew up in a Jewish neighborhood in the Bronx. Although I was hardly a "stranger in the land of Egypt," I often felt like an outsider. At P.S. 114 our readers featured farms, pick-up trucks, and grandmothers who wore their hair in buns and had names like Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Jones. My grandmother, a Bronxite, had my last name, Moldof, which no one could spell or pronounce correctly. She spoke and read only Yiddish, had short curly hair, and made schnapps in her bathtub. Moreover, I never saw a cow, much less a pickup truck, until I went to college in Ohio. So when I began writing for children I was determined to break the cliche. My first picture book, Grandma Is Somebody Special, portrayed my mother, a widow, living in an apartment in Los Angeles, working in an office and attending night school.

In New York in the early 1950s, a class distinction existed between Manhattan Jews and those of us in the Bronx. A boy I met at summer camp invited me on a date to his home, an elegant co-op on Park Avenue. Then he came to my birthday party in his chauffeur-driven car. His mother swiftly ended the friendship because of my address. I still remembered the hurt I felt as I recently wrote in a book on the history of Jews in America about the clash between "Uptown" and "Downtown" in New York at the beginning of the 20th century.

Susan Goldman Rubin is the author of more than 35 books for children and readers of all ages, most recently *Art Against the Odds: From Slave Quilts to Prison Paintings* (Crown/Random House, 2004) and *L'Chaim! To Jewish Life in America! Celebrating from 1654 Until Today* (Abrams in association with The Jewish Museum, 2004).

Emily Nussbaum

At Last! I Didn't Belong!

When I moved to Atlanta in my mid-20s, I got a sweet surprise. Up north, I had always had plenty in common with the women around me, Jewish and otherwise. There was always another chatterbox with fuzzy black hair; another argumentative proto-feminist with activist pretensions. I perpetually reminded someone of their friend from high school.

But in Atlanta, I was suddenly exotic. Or at least, I felt exotic. If Atlanta is not much of a Southern city (at least to Southerners), it was Southern enough for me: there were women in flowered dresses, with drawling vowels and a femininity alien to a New Yorker. At the industrial real estate company where I worked, another secretary confided how much she'd enjoyed her time as a sorority girl at Georgia State, circling the fat on freshman pledges in black marker. I opened a drawer to find that my roommate was storing a gun. At the rape crisis hotline where I volunteered, the other trainees (born-again Christian Junior Leaguers) were so stridently polite I initially took their friendliness for sarcasm.

It felt fantastic. At last, I didn't belong. Victimization is bad, but outsiderhood? Very few of us really outgrow the craving for specialness —even if growing up means recognizing that that craving is just another quality we share with the rest of the world. In all my favorite childhood books, the heroines had red hair: Caddie Woodlawn, Anne of Green Gables, Pippi Longstocking. It was a metaphor for uniqueness, passion and oddness. (Also available in Manic Panic!) In Atlanta, for a while, I had the equivalent. Like membership, outsiderhood has its privileges: the sense of one's individuality sharpening, outlined in the black marker of those around you.

Emily Nussbaum is the culture editor at New York Magazine. Her writing has been published in the New York Times, Slate, and Nerve.

Pnina Moed Kass

What Would Be Sufficient?

I wanted so many things but more than anything I wanted to write.
If only I could write.
Dayenu.
My parents taught me words in Russian, French, German, English.
I added words of my own. In a new home, new words— words in Hebrew.
I shoveled the words like coal into bins, to keep me warm—community words, story words, Bible words, wife words, mother words, words from my childhood, blessing words.
Dayenu.

I was afraid of some words—old, forget, remember.

And on top I piled the words of Israel—war words, peace words.

Long words: negotiation, mediation, reconciliation, repatriation, conflagration, nation.
Short words: die, dying, dead, death, calm, truce, border, silence, hope.
Dayenu.
I pried open words that were shut like shells and spilled the meat into sentences and pages and books.
Dayenu.
With the arrogance of my craft I imagined I would find the words to part the sea, banish the evildoers, herald the light. I didn't.

Hate. Love. Let me have the words to bridge them and I will say Dayenu.

* **Dayenu**, "it would be sufficient," is the refrain of the Passover seder hymn.

Pnina Moed Kass has lived in Israel for 36 years—the third country she has made her home. Much of her writing has dealt with the struggle, or pain, or victory of an "outsider." "Five Words," an IRA YA Short Story winner, is about a young girl whose mother heroically throws her off a train bound for a concentration camp. When the girl reaches Israel she struggles to become part of kibbutz society. A series of seven picture books in Hebrew, "Berele," portrays a snail who yearns to be as strong, or as fast, or as adventuresome as the animals around him. "Mr. Shaabi" (in a UNICEF anthology) is about an Iraqi Jew trapped in the bombardment of Baghdad. *Real Time* (Clarion 2004) is a novel about people involved in suicide bus bombing. From the 16-year-old suicide bomber, to the Arab doctor, to the new immigrant from Odessa, to a teenager from Berlin, they are all outsiders.

Carol Snyder

Chicken?

I'm leaving my world of motherhood and children. My busy, safe, laughter-filled, tear-stained, milk-spilling world, to have dinner at Rutgers University and meet my favorite author, Dr. Chaim Potok. My copy of his book My Name is Asher Lev is well worn. I hope I will think of something important to ask him and the group of professors and scholars seated at my round table for 10 at Hillel. I hope I will not automatically cut up his food into bite-size pieces.

CAROL SNYDER

My first book, Ike and Mama and the Once-a-Year Suit, has been accepted for publication. After five years of rejection letters, I am entering a new world, a literary one. I'm like a stranger in Egypt. I'm a mother moving on in my life, leaving my children behind, if only for a day. Dinner discussions at my house involve lines like this:

"She's looking at me! Make her stop." Or, "She'll take the biggest piece." Whereupon I become Solomon of the Cake Servers.

Tonight's dinner conversation involves real war and peace, and scholarly interpretations of the Bible. It's a foreign language

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to me. I don't understand. I don't contribute. And here is my favorite author, seated next to me.

But then, perhaps because I am the only female at the table, the platter of chicken is placed before me to be served. My tongue becomes untied. I am on familiar ground. I speak for the first time to the awesome author and scholar.

"Dr. Potok?" I say, turning to him. "I have a very important question for you." I hesitate a moment.

"Yes?"

Everyone is listening. Then I ask, pointing to the platter of chicken with a serving fork. "Do you want dark meat or light?"

He smiles and laughs and says, "Either."

The ice is broken. We are all on common ground and talk as humans to each other. I am no longer a stranger in Egypt.

Carol Snyder lives in New York City and has written 14 books for young readers, including the *Ike and Mama* books, and *God Must Like Cookies, Too* (Jewish Publication Society). She is also an illustrator and artist.

Susie Morgenstern

My Country Is Judaism

Outsider experiences? The question hits home so hard that I don't know where to start. I am an American Jew, writing in French and living in Nice.

I guess my American accent in French (and Hebrew) is as strong as was my grandmother's; she lived a lifetime in Brooklyn and eternally spoke English as if it were the Russian-Yiddish of her childhood. It's okay for a grandmother to speak with an accent, but what about a mother? I think my greatest estrangement was from my own children—I tell this story in Open Your Eyes (Viking, 2003). When I picked them up at school they would say "Just walk and don't open your mouth." Probably the only fleeting moments in my life when I wasn't a stranger were my days in the Newark Hebrew Academy and in Hebrew University in Jerusalem (where I met my French husband). But my country has always been Judaism, so I feel quite at home attached to my own portable roots wherever I am.

As a children's writer, I go to all the mean sections, educational "priority zones" populated by North African kids and they ask me with great hostility: "Why do you write about Jews?" I answer, "Because I'm a Jew!" They look at me in horror. "Have you ever met a Jew before?" I ask. And they say no. "Well, now that you've met me, what do you think?" Dialogue is a real antidote to hatred!

Gender issues as well as Jewish and foreigner status have been great themes in my books.

Susie Morgenstern was born in Newark, New Jersey. Life (and love) brought her to Nice, France. She has written 50 books among which seven are translated into English (Viking), and she teaches in the University of Nice.

> Just as we don't choose our dreams, we don't choose the plots of our stories.
>
> —Lore Segal

Galila Ron-Feder-Amit

An Israeli Foster Mother

All my life I have felt like an outsider, and it is clearly one of the motivations that pushes me to write. A year after I got married I took 10 children from broken families into my home and became their foster mother. During that period I felt as if I was observing our common life—mine and theirs—from the outside, and that if I would go inside, I preferred to see the goings-on from their point of view. This experience gave birth to my best known book To Myself (El Atzmee), which was written in the first person. The protagonist of the book, Tzion Cohen, a boy from a broken home who comes to live in a foster family, is not ready to accept their bourgeois rules of how to behave and criticizes them sharply.

Conversation with Arab students in Jewish schools again confronted me with the position of the outsider, but this time as a Jewish woman. The Arab students shared with me the feelings of oppression they have when they find themselves in Jewish society, and I identified with them, actually because the Jewish people have been and continue to be the victims of racism too. This conversation, and the feelings that accompanied it, yielded my book Nadia, written in the first person from the point of view of an Arab girl who studies at a Jewish boarding school and challenges Israeli complacency.

Galila Ron-Feder-Amit was born in Haifa in 1949. She has written over 230 books for young readers, five novels for adults, and is the editor of several children's magazines. Her work has been adapted for radio, screen and stage and has been translated into German, French, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Korean and Japanese.

Rebecca Alban Hoffberger

In Favor of Outsiderhood

An outsider's observation: Was Egypt really so bad for us strangers? After all, it was in Egypt where a psychic Jewish slave, betrayed and abandoned by his own Jewish brothers, rose to be second only to Pharaoh in position and power. Joseph—as is statistically borne out to this day—was far more likely to be harmed by family than by strangers. Yet we persist in warning against the stranger.

My home is Baltimore—a city that leads the country in heroin usage and venereal disease—and yet also supports the most diverse Jewish American community and an abundance of other blessings. This synchronous dance of the sublime and the hellish links Baltimore with both Egypt and modern-

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day Israel and, heck, to pretty much the whole earth. Baltimore has always been a good place to be strange. It's been terra firma to many extraterrestrial outsiders like Edgar Allen Poe, John Waters, Barry Levinson, Billie Holiday, Benjamin Banneker, Henrietta Szold, and the Jewish Fuld brothers who first patented the Ouiji Board. My childhood's most influential reading? Oscar Levant's hilarious Memoirs of an Amnesiac, Nijinksy's Diary, Madame Blavatsky's The Secret Doctrine, and Martin Buber's all and everything. Who are my favorite Jewish outsider heroes today? Orthodox artist Mierele Ukeles, and "Trembling Before G-d" filmmaker, Sandi Dubowsky.

Rebecca Alban Hoffberger is director and founder of the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, MD, www.avam.org

"Oh, you're so creative," they'd say. Which was a way of making sure I knew I wasn't like them.

—Ellen Kushner

Kathy Walden Kaplan

An Adult Can Be Your Best Friend

Many memories were woven together to tell The Dog of Knots, a story of a dog, a little girl, and her friends during the Yom Kippur War. The year I lived in Haifa I met a woman whose family had lived in Jerusalem for three generations. She had just moved to Haifa and she complained that both she and her nine-year-old daughter were having trouble making friends. It was a thread I used to create my story.

The Dog of Knots, about an Israeli girl, reflects so much of my life. Unable to find friends her own age, Mayim, my main character, makes friends with adults in her neighborhood. I did the same when I was a youngster, my best friend was the mother of one of my playmates. When my family moved to Salt Lake City I took her address written on a slip of paper and began a correspondence that continues to this day. Children can have friends outside their peer group. Adults can be their friends. The school janitor was a pal when I was in sixth grade; he gave me a lot of good advice.

Human beings exclude each other. It seems a big part of who we are. If kids are open to possibilities, they don't have to live isolated lives.

Kathy Walden Kaplan's limited-edition books—*Crow Story: A Legend of the Chumash; Poppyrose;* and *Becoming Nature*—appeared at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington. *The Dog of Knots* (Eerdmans, 2004) won a Work-in-Progress grant from the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

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If My Grandmother Could Have Written a Postcard to the Sister Left Behind

by Lyn Lifshin

It would be written
on sand, or on a
hand colored photo
graph of a country
with nobody waiting
with guns, no thatched
roofs on fire, no
hiding in trees after
a knock on the
door: *Sister, it is*
nothing like we had
or what we imagined.
There are no Jews
in the small rural
towns hardly. They
don't spit or say
we are thieves but
it is as icy in Vermont
as days in Russia.
Lake Champlain is
not like our sea. We
are safe, we are
lonely

Lyn Lifshin has written more than 100 books and edited four anthologies of women writers. Her most recent chapbook is *Another Woman's Story* (Butcher Shop Press, 2004). www.LynLifshin.com

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3 Fresh Views of Israel:
Savyon Liebrecht, Shemi Zahrin & Ruth Halperin-Kaddari

1 "Following a Story, Like in a Dream"

Savyon Liebrecht, the acclaimed Israeli fiction writer, recently visited Boston, where she was the quiet star of a reception given by the Israeli Consulate and, the next day, a speaker at Harvard. Although Liebrecht, 56, has been widely read in Hebrew since the publication of her first short story collection in 1986, English-language readers had to wait until 1989, when LILITH published Barbara Harshav's original translation of the short story "Apples from the Desert" in a special section devoted to "Fresh Fiction from Israel." This story gave its title to a Liebrecht collection published in 1998 by The Feminist Press, Apples from the Desert: Selected Stories. Persea Books brought out the novel A Man and a Woman and a Man in 2001 and will publish A Good Place for the Night next year. In Boston, **Karen Propp** spoke to Liebrecht about her work and her life.

I thought I had to clean up the house first, and then I found I had only an hour left for writing.

KP: Your stories are dense with the good stuff of fiction—plot, character, conflict—and rich with meaning about Israeli society, the human heart, family, love. In "Hayuta's Engagement Party," two generations are deeply ashamed of a grandfather who feels compelled to recount his most horrific concentration camp memories at every festive occasion. In "Apples from the Desert," an Orthodox mother confronts her daughter who has run off to a kibbutz where she finds both autonomy and love. In "The Homesick Scientist," an elderly man is awkwardly reunited with his beloved nephew, who has long since left for an American career. Too multi-layered and complex to be reduced to a single sentence, your stories stay with the reader; they live off the page.

Even your first stories are so masterful it makes me wonder about their gestation. Could you talk about your apprenticeship years?

SL: I wrote my first novel when I was 18, when I was a soldier girl on a kibbutz. I decided to take advantage of the fact that I was given a room of my own. I stayed there one year, working with children. After the army I went to England, where I wrote another novel. My first story was published when I was 38. "Apples from the Desert."

KP: What were you doing in between?

SL: I studied at University of Tel Aviv. I wrote articles for a women's magazine. I had no time for [creative] writing, with marrying and raising a family. When things settled down, I said to myself, 'now it's time.'"

In the beginning I shared a room with my husband, actually my ex-husband, who is a psychologist. I used his room. I had from eight until 12, when my kids were in school. At first I thought I had to clean up [the house], and then I found I had only an hour left for writing. So then I decided to only clear the table and put on a tablecloth, and a vase with flowers. That was how I staked my claim. Then I had three hours or so for writing. And I cleaned up when my children came home.

KP: How did Grace Paley come to write the introduction to Apples?

SL: In 1991, I spent two months in the International Program for Writers at the University of Iowa. When I was there, I asked one of the people in the English Department, "Who is the best American short story writer?" And he said, "Grace Paley, without a doubt."

When I read her I was fascinated, loved her. Years later, when I was sent a cover of my book, I saw there on the cover: Introduction by Grace Paley! And then we shared a reading in the Jewish Museum, which was the summit of my professional life. I decided to say 'Thank you' by translating [Paley's short story collection] Later the Same Day into Hebrew. Her language is so dense, it makes her difficult to translate. I tried to catch something of the voice. I could hear the Yiddish in her voice, and I tried to capture some of her spirit.

KP: What are you working on now?

SL: A novel or a novella, half of which happens in the States. A boy with an American mother and an Israeli father; they live in Tel Aviv. The mother goes to America to visit her father. She is pregnant and while in the States must go on bed rest, so cannot return to Israel. The father, who is kind of a poet, and relies on his wife for income, begins taking his son to cafes, where he meets his lovers. Then, something tragic happens, and the boy is sought by the police.

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Eventually he is found and sent to the States at age seven, where he grows up as an American. Thirty years later his father comes to visit.

When I was in New York, two months ago, I went to look for a house where the boy in the story comes to live when he is seven years old; the house where he grows up. I found a house for him to live on the corner of 23rd Street and Second Avenue. And I spent about two hours, having a kind of romance with the house. I went inside and found out something of the history of the place. I went to a café across the street and just drank coffee, looking at the house, and I decided what window was the boy's. I walked around, trying to figure out what he could actually see from that window.

KP: Your characters seem at once so representative of Israeli life and yet so multi-dimensional. How do you do it?

SL: I really don't know. Something comes to me and I'm not so much making up a story as following it like in a dream.

KP: Are any of your stories autobiographical?

SL: Only one, "A Room on the Roof." [A story that narrates a nuanced set of relations in the day-to-day contact between a middle-class Israeli woman, whose husband is away, and the three Arab construction workers she has hired.] This actually happened to me in '82. At the time I had two young children at home. My husband was in the army and I employed three Palestinians. For the first time I understood how really difficult it is to communicate—how different our codes are. When I went to fetch my daughter from kindergarten, I left my one-year-old son in their care. You could never do that now! The situation is so much worse. It will take half a century to get back to where we already were then.

KP: Did you really bring them tea in your best china to the roof?

SL: Yes.

KP: And the Arab worker from Gaza? In this story, the man who had medical training, who, in the story's turning point, soothes the baby fallen from his crib with more tenderness than the baby's own father?

SL: No, that event I invented.

2 A Cinderella-Like Boy in a New Israeli Film

"Bonjour, Monsieur!" is how the sweet-eyed, frizzy haired protagonist of this new Israeli film greets his Hebrew-speaking grandfather, entering the home that, as its inhabitants arrive, seems more like a circus than a dwelling place.

In writer-director **Shemi Zahrin's "Bonjour Monsieur Shlomi,"** 16-year-old Shlomi is the boy next door: unglamorous, underachieving, lovable, and lost under the maelstrom of family life. Shlomi trudges through his days seemingly unaware that he's the one taking care of this aging grandfather, plus negotiating an overbearing mother, the father she threw out for philandering, a self-centered older brother, and a despairing sister juggling newborn twins and her well-intentioned but misguided husband. The misunderstandings weaving through the film suggest a future of "fixing" for this unusually nurturing teenage boy. Throw in the distracting, sizzling, age-appropriate female neighbor Rona, and it is not hard to understand why Shlomi's genius continues to go unrecognized.

Gender switch: A teenage *boy* as his family's caregiver.

Shlomi's Cinderella-like status—overworked and overlooked by his family—shifts when one of his teachers discovers his rare capacities. Shlomi challenges gender roles. He dutifully serves as head of conciliatory affairs at the Bardayan household, along with being the cook, the maid, and the messenger—a load far too heavy for his narrow shoulders. When he's offered a place at a boarding school for gifted teens, Shlomi struggles to discover that he can, and must, live for himself, and as himself.

It's wonderful to see this sensitive teen boy find his way. Though the film's idyllic romantic exchanges easily become saccharine (master chef Shlomi woos expert gardener Rona with baked goods, and she returns the flirtation with an azalea or two) the authenticity of the characters and their struggles make "Bonjour Monsieur Shlomi" notably refreshing. Catch it in commercial distribtuion and as part of the Israeli film festival in New York, Miami, and Chicago (www.israelifilmfestival.com.)

—Talya Lieberman

Why Laws Hardly Improve Women's Status in Israel

In Israel, family issues are governed by both religious and civil law.

Ruth Halperin-Kaddari's densely informative text **Women in Israel: A State of their Own** (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) is based on the author's "Report on the State of Israel Concerning the Implementation of the U.N Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)." Halperin-Kaddari is a professor of law at Bar-Ilan University who combines feminist legal theories with a broad, sociological perspective on gender and Israeli society. She looks at all aspects of women's lives: legal issues—affirmative action and mothers' rights in the workplace—along with social issues, such as employment, health, social benefits, the media, family, violence against women, and women's representation in public life,

Most countries trying to enforce a unified religious/cultural identity are not democracies. Israel, uniquely, is both a developed country with a democratic structure and one in which the government tries to maintain a special religious and cultural identity in a diverse society. Halperin-Kaddari claims that this paradox has led to Israel's failure to adopt a single national standard for women's rights that would comply with international human rights standards. Also, Israel's government does not seem to believe that there are any problems with women's status in the country. According to Halperin-Kaddari, there are two exceptional factors in Israel affecting women's status. First, the formal and informal effects of religion; second, the national security agenda. Israel is also unique in that family issues are governed by both religious and civil systems.

Halperin-Kaddari shows how Israeli society slowly became aware of discrimination against women, and describes the steps that were taken to combat it in "The Legal Setting," the first of the book's three sections. "Progress and the Limits of Law" examines women's status in different arenas in Israel, such as education, and employment. Each chapter describes the laws and history of legislation on an issue, followed by a sociological discussion of the broader meaning and social context of these rules and regulations.

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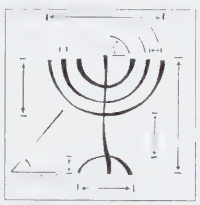
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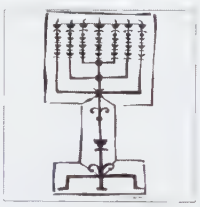
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In the third section, "Power Politics, Body Politics, and Radical Feminism," Halperin-Kaddari explores how Israeli society deals with women's sexuality, violence against women and other family issues. The final chapter contains new material that was not included in the CEDAW report, about Ethiopian, Mizrachi, and Druze women, and other marginalized groups in Israel and a brief discussion of issues facing lesbians.

Halperin-Kaddari notes that one of the main issues in addressing systemic discrimination against Israeli women is the lack of specific information on women's status. For example, women are not counted as a separate category in Israel's Annual Report on Poverty. And there has been no evaluation of reforms in different areas, such as the Prevention of Violence in the Family Law of 1991.

Israel has many progressive laws on the books, including the Women's Equal Rights Law of 1951, enacted shortly after the founding of the State, and the much-lauded Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law. Yet despite these impressive-sounding statutes there hasn't been much improvement in women's status. Why? Halperin-Kaddari concludes that these progressive laws were created without any standards to enforce them. Other factors also come into play. Israel's government has not allocated resources to tackle these social problems. And religious bodies still control issues of personal status, such as marriage and divorce, so problems in these areas cannot be solved using civil law.

Halperin-Kaddari answers the main question of those fighting for human rights—Can law be used as a tool of social change?—with a qualified "Yes, but it's not enough." She and other progressive legal scholars argue for the necessity of practical and social/cultural infrastructure to support the changes mandated by new laws. Laws are not independent social forces, but are "connected to the interests they represent," argues Halperin-Kaddari, vaguely echoing the feminist avowal, "the personal is political." Despite this cautionary qualification, Halperin-Kaddari believes that Israeli society is at "a turning point where legal discourse and the accompanying legal feminism seem to facilitate a social change."

—*Susan Sapiro*

Our Reviewers

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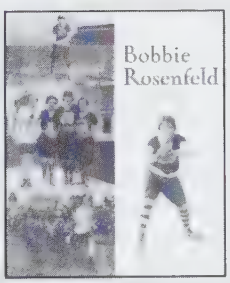

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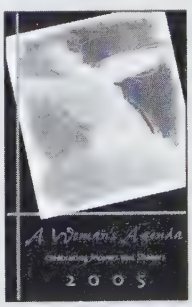

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THE ROSENBERGS, REDUX
A Different Kind of Survivor Family

Heir to an Execution, a film by
Ivy Meeropol, Blowback Productions

Fifty-one years after the fact, I still find it impossible not to become impassioned about the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, put to death in the electric chair on June 19, 1953, on flimsy, some say 'trumped up" evidence of "conspiracy to commit espionage" for the Soviet Union. At the height of the Cold War, during the terror of the McCarthy era, simply being "accused" was tantamount to being guilty. Ethel Rosenberg's younger brother, David Greenglass, caught spying for the Russians, accused his brother-in-law Julius of passing secrets of the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union. And because David implicated Ethel, who had typed up her husband's notes; she too was convicted and put to death.

From the beginning, there was a sensational aspect to this case. Not only had a family member testified against his relatives (lying or grossly exaggerating the facts to save his own life—he had to serve only 15 years in jail), but even Ethel's own mother turned against her, placing the Rosenbergs' two young boys (Michael, 7, and Robert,3) in an orphanage to pressure her daughter to confess, or at least to "name names." During the three years Ethel and Julius were incarcerated in Sing-Sing prison, and especially in the months preceding their execution, public opinion was sharply divided. While some trumpeted the Rosenbergs' guilt and called for their death, many more supported them with rallies and worldwide pleas for clemency. To the very end, the Rosenbergs themselves insisted on their innocence.

Previously classified documents from U.S. and Soviet sources, made public in the last decade, reveal that Julius (under the code name "Liberal") had indeed passed information to the Russians. But it is equally clear that he did not commit the crime (stealing the secret of the atom bomb) for which he was executed. The fact that Ethel had no code name and is not even mentioned in these files confirms that she herself had never spied, but was held hostage by the government in order to put pressure on Julius to talk. Some believe that even these documents implicating Julius were "doctored" after the fact by the FBI.

"Heir to an Execution," directed by Ivy Meeropol, the Rosenbergs' granddaughter (child of their older son, Michael), fixes the

Ethel and Julius Rosenberg

It still haunts me: Why didn't the Rosenbergs save themselves for the sake of their children?

Rosenbergs in their socio-cultural and historical contexts. But the film also adds a previously unexplored dimension by documenting the impact of the trial and execution on the extended family. Relatives abandoned the two boys in spite of Ethel's pleas to her sister-in-law (on Julius' side) to take them in. As Michael Meeropol mournfully asks in the film, who knows what would have become of him and his younger brother Robert had they not been adopted by Annie and Abel Meeropol?

Only recently, through the efforts of the grandchildren, are the rifts in the extended family slowly being healed, although even now some family members refused to have their voices taped for this film. And David Greenglass remains a pathetic villain, a shadowy figure who hides behind the closed blinds of his house (shown in the film); he managed to remain alive, but at a very high price, and remains a symbol of cowardice and betrayal. Michael Meeropol says he is glad that his parents remained true to themselves and did not have to live with shame like his uncle David. Resigned to accept the past, Michael claims he has relinquished the impulse for revenge.

Also included in this film are interviews with Ivy Meeropol's cousin Rachel (Robert's daughter) and her brother Greg, who are carrying on their parents' and grandparents' commitment to social change. Although Rachel recognizes that "justice is not easy," she has become a lawyer, sometimes fantasizing herself in the place of her grandparents' defense attorney.

One of this film's great strengths is that it humanizes the Rosenbergs—especially Ethel, repeatedly portrayed as an uncaring mother who gladly abandoned her children, an "unnatural woman," and a domineering shrew. Footage from old family films shows Ethel and Julius as loving partners, devoted parents and idealists with aspirations. Yet the question that continues to haunt me (and I suspect, most viewers) is why the Rosenbergs refused to try to save themselves for the sake of their children. Harry Steingart, one of their close comrades, answers simply "They couldn't. If either of them had 'talked,' they would not have been able to face the other." This answer doesn't help us understand how they thought about leaving their children orphaned, though their concern for the boys is evident in the many loving letters they wrote to them from prison.

The impact of the sexism of the 1950's is well demonstrated in the film by a photograph that was set up by the defense lawyers and widely circulated: Ethel

standing in the kitchen, wearing a house dress, dish towel in hand, making certain that the world sees that she knows her place as a woman. In the public eye, being a Jewish woman made Ethel seem even more monstrous once she had crossed the line from the domestic sphere into the political arena, placing her ideals above her children's welfare. An unusual aspect of this film is the interview with Dr. Elizabeth Phillips, a psychotherapist to whom Ethel took Michael at age 6 because he was a difficult, willful child who had eating problems. Dr. Phillips seems to have admired the games Ethel devised to get him to eat; she visited Ethel in the women's detention center and speaks movingly of her as an "endearing" person.

Perhaps it is not fair to ask that a film focusing on family responses include all aspects of this case, but it seems to me that the Jewish dimension (and the open anti-Semitism of the period) marked the Rosenberg case from the beginning and was insufficiently explored in the film. Many believe that the Rosenbergs were singled out because the words "Jew" and "Commie" were virtually interchangeable under McCarthyism. While some argued that anti-Semitism could not have been a factor because the judge, prosecutor and prosecution witnesses were all Jews, others suggested that these Jews were harsher on the Rosenbergs and bent over backwards trying to prove that not all Jews were "Commies." Because not a single juror in this New York City trial was Jewish, many argue that the jury selection was skewed against them from the beginning. Only a decade after the Holocaust, in the face of anti-Jewish purges in the Soviet Union, Jews on both the political right and left felt vulnerable and frightened. In fact, Morton Sobel, who was a co-defendant with the Rosenbergs (but was not electrocuted), said he was flabbergasted that Julius stood up to the government, as he knew him to be a fearful person—with good reason.

In those years, I too was afraid. Like the Rosenberg's sons, Robert and Michael, I too had witnessed my father's arrest (by the Nazis, rather than the FBI). Therefore, when, in the spring of 1953, I (a young college student still living at home), was asked to sign a petition to "Save the Rosenbergs," I did not add my name, afraid that if I supported them I too would be accused of being a communist. Perhaps it was this refusal (which still discomforts me) that fueled my determination never again to remain silent. Perhaps it led to my researching the Rosenberg files in the recently opened FBI archives 50 years after their execution. As a Jewish feminist, I longed to understand Ethel as a person in her own right, but reading through the files did not provide answers, and I cannot say that Ivy Meeropol's film about the survivors of this family legacy answers my questions either, but it does provide a much needed perspective on the Rosenbergs, described by one of their peers as "just ordinary people, but political." "Heir to an Execution" shows us that ordinary people can do extraordinary things, both for good and for evil, and often in the name of "the larger good." It also demonstrates just how personal the "political" can become. *— Evelyn Torton Beck*

Women, Important in Poetry

The literary world tends to elevate male novelists to the status of "important artists" more than it does female novelists. Not so in poetry. Many of the most highly regarded and influential figures in contemporary poetry are women, and they are changing the laws governing the appraisal of "important work" that have long favored work by and about men.

Lucie Brock-Broido, director of the poetry program at Columbia's Graduate School of the Arts, is one of those increasingly prominent female poets. In her third book, **Trouble in Mind** (Knopf, $23), she declares, "I am tired/ Of women who are sad. I am tired/ Of men who are tired." With each poem in this considerable collection, Brock-Broido uses her lyrical ability to address emotional truths with a ferocity and musicality unlike that of any other poet writing today. As in her earlier books, it is impossible to anticipate where the poems are headed. "A Truce to Tragedy" begins with the wind, "tobacco-colored in its field of mere/And war," and leaps to a closing rumination "on what might not have been/ And long, but tenderly."

A handful of poems touch on Jewish subjects. In "Still Life with Aspirin," the West Bank is "an eternal circle of chalk and bruise and war," Jerusalem: "somewhere/ Between fancy & imagination," and herself "the gallowglass guarding the history and turf of everything/Intimate." In the memorable poem "Soul Keeping Company," Brock-Broido reflects on the Jewish mourning ritual of staying with the deceased until burial; she remains with her mother's body "through the affliction of the night, keeping/ Soul constant, a second self." Her only wish, she states in the poem, is to be magical—an impossibility when it comes to saving a relative, but she does come awfully close in the lyric wizardry of this masterful collection.

A radically different but equally accomplished poet, **Marilyn Hacker,** also writes of mourning in her tenth collection, **Desesperanto** (Norton, $23.95). The winner of a National Book Award and other honors, Hacker divides her time between New York City and Paris, both of which find their way into her poetry. Hacker listens to the life of the cities she inhabits, the old men "arguing/ on benches, in French, in Mandarin,/ in Arabic, Yiddish and Portuguese." Sitting in a French café, she overhears: "Five old men/ dissect last week's election." Later in the conversation: "Victor, will/ at last bring up Israel/—sixtyish son asking his/ elders what ought to be done." Hacker generally maintains distance from the characters she observes, reporting more than assessing them: who speaks first, who interrupts, who finally changes the subject.

In a few poems, however, she diminishes that distance, as in her eulogy for Karig Sára, a Finnish woman who worked with the Red Cross to save orphans and children of deported Jewish parents in World War II. Hacker tells of one girl who later searched out Sára to tell of her success as a writer: "Partisan, scribe and second mother: motherless, childless," Hacker says to Sára, "you made each other/ possible. Without you, less is possible."

Hacker searches for those heroes, like Sára, who: "invent themselves from daily/ womanhood." The poems in this collection honor such women: Muriel Rukeyser, and June Jordan, who Hacker calls "a Cassandra/ Lilith in the wilderness of her lyric." What else can you do, she asks, "but tell someone the story?"

—Idra Novey

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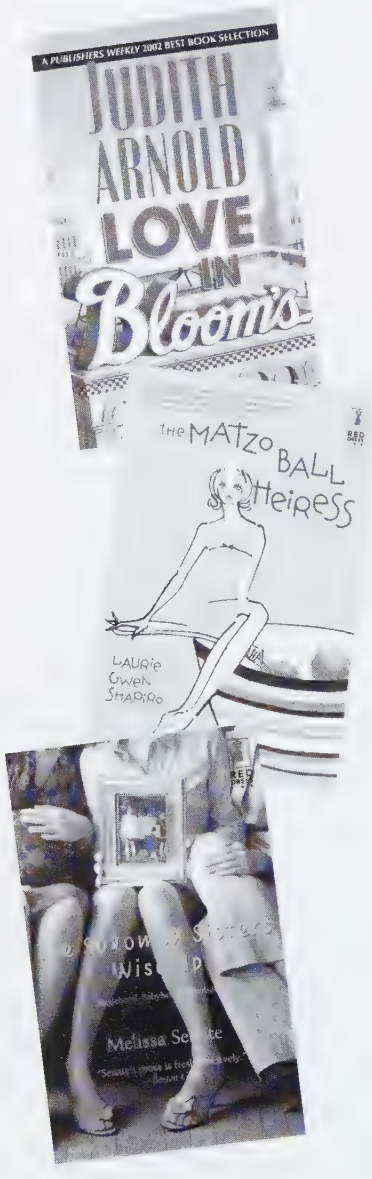
Eye on Arts & Culture

Romance Novels with Balls—Matzoh Balls



Some dismiss them as worthless women's chatter, but romance novels, crossing class and economic boundaries since the 18th century, have given creative and economic opportunities to thousands of women. Overcoming old ethnic and cultural limitations, these hugely popular novels are now featuring Latinas, African-Americans, and middle-aged heroines. Increasing numbers of themes and protagonists are Jewish, carrying stories that were sometimes hidden between the lines out onto the covers.

Often derisively mislabeled and misconstrued, a look at current plots and historical samples shows that the romance novel has consistently highlighted women's self-reliance and self-respect since its first publication in 1740. Yet, it has taken 250 years to overtly add cultural diversity to its fictional world.

Historically, Jewish romance authors seem to have separated their Judaism from their writing, but each writer seems to have negotiated the divide in her own way. While Carly Phillips, whose recent novel, Under the Boardwalk (Phillips Warner, 2004), involves a Greek family in Vermont, chooses to keep her faith a private matter, Sari Robins says she approaches her "entire career from a Judaic home outlook." Yet, Robins, whose One Wicked Night (Harper Collins, 2004) is an "Atlanta Woman Magazine" Favorite Book, avoids writing about "any specific religious practices…[I want] nobody to feel excluded."

"Why shouldn't Jewish culture be interesting to others?"

Asked to take Jewish content out of her first novel, The Fictitious Marquis (Avon, 1995), Alina Adams (nee Sivorinsky) writes, "My editor didn't want to offend anyone. So, like my heroine, I decided that the next time I wrote a book featuring Jews, I would keep it a secret." Since then she has masked the Jewish identities of her characters using "subtle hints scattered in the story—such as both characters agreeing to go to work on Christmas Day—to clue in the observant reader."

Lately the door does seem to have opened wider for explicitly Jewish protagonists and storylines. "Jewish" titles themselves signal the breakthrough, like Melissa Senate's The Solomon Sisters Wise Up and Laurie Gwen Shapiro's The Matzo Ball Heiress, two recent romance comedies about independent Jewish women.

Best selling author and self-proclaimed "old hippie" Judith Arnold says, "Other cultures are interesting to me. Why shouldn't my culture be interesting to others?" Sweet Light (Harlequin American, 1992) is a snowbound Hanukkah romance. Love In Bloom's (MIRA, 2003) and its sequel, Blooming All Over (MIRA, 2004), feature a Jewish family running a Zabar's-like deli on the Upper West Side in New York.

Rather than being sidelined, recent "Jewish" romance novels are widely marketed and recognized. Arnold's Love in Bloom's was a finalist for a 2003 RITA Award. The highest award in romance publishing, it is offered by the professional organization Romance Writers of America (RWA). Brenda Ray's novel The Midwife's Song: A Story of Moses' Birth (Karmichael Press, 2004) received the Inspirational Reader's Choice Award from Faith, Hope & Love, Inc, an RWA chapter of religious—primarily Christian—orientation.

Cultural diversity aside, is this literary genre "worthless women's chatter?" With women in control as producers, sellers and consumers of a 1.63 billion dollar business, its strength and value are clear. Yet, romance authors have suffered the fate of women artists in every generation: their work, historically undervalued, is seldom reviewed or preserved.

RWA statistics show that more than 2,000 new romance titles are published each year; 34% of all popular fiction sales in this country, 54% of paperbacks. Doctors, teachers, at-home mothers, women of every profession and background, including former Air Force Colonel Merline Lovelace, are writing for this genre. Nearly 9,000 have joined RWA.

A closer look at the field reveals more about its ideological underpinnings and appeal. Teri Sprackland, economic journalist and winner of RWA's 2003 Veritas Award, sees the genre as "carrying forward a vast history in the women's subculture…a ritual retelling of stories [to deal with] perennial issues not really resolved, such as the compromises of marriage."

It is "women speaking to women about things that matter to women," says Arnold.

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Her romance Barefoot in the Grass (Harlequin Superromances, 1996), for example, is about a woman grappling with the loss of her breast to cancer.

The novels contain two basic elements, according to RWA. One is the inextricably intertwined storyline and love interest; Two, is "an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending." Perhaps surprising is that "happily ever after" does not necessarily mean marriage in romance, especially in the Chic-Lit sub-genre, but "based on the idea of an innate emotional justice," the only love worth having is a healthy, nurturing one of respect and mutual compromise.

The field itself seems to support a tremendously nurturing atmosphere for both writers and readers. A professional incubator, RWA mixes start-ups with multi-million dollar successes who literally instruct their competition at conferences, meetings, critique groups and Internet conversations. Veterans teach writing along with marketing skills.

Authors are in direct contact with readers via website contests, round robin writing and local events. This may explain the phenomenal growth and success of the romance genre as an art form and a business. It is a longstanding conversation creating and maintaining community as women regularly do

Jessica Davis Stein, a former psychotherapist turned author observes that "Women from vastly different cultures connect more easily than a man and a woman from the same background." .

—Joyce Goodman and Anna Sugden

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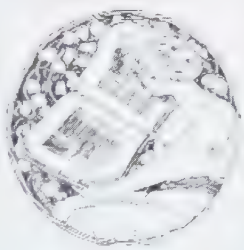

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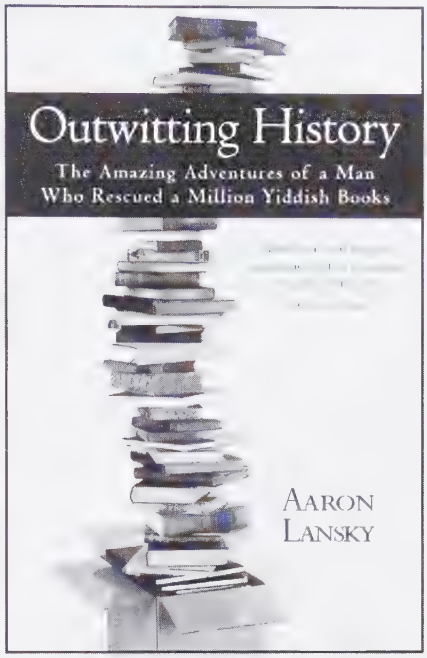

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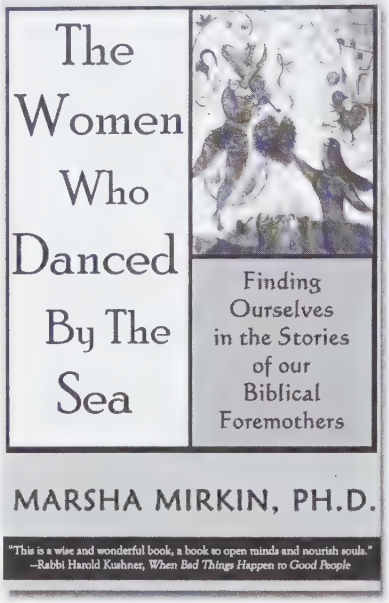
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Marsha Mirkin, Ph.D. is a resident scholar at Brandeis University Women's Studies Research Center. The ideas for this book are drawn from courses she has been teaching on psychological interpretations and the contemporary relevance of the Bible.

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book excerpt

Women Leading Prayers—in the 16th Century

Since at this season many of us spend more time in synagogue or temple than at any other, it's a good time to remember our precursors in prayer. Here is a brief history of women's special role in synagogue, from The JPS Guide To Jewish Women 600 B.C.E.-1900 C.E. by Emily Taitz, Sondra Henry & Cheryl Tallan (Jewish Publication Society, 2003):

Documents and gravestones point to the fact that by the sixteenth century, almost every synagogue in Germany and Eastern Europe had its own woman precentor who was able to lead the prayers and sometimes translated them into Yiddish for the women. They were called firzogerins (literally, those who said the words "before") or zugerkes. Both these words mean "prayer leader" and both assume a feminine gender. Although women functioned as prayer leaders throughout the Ashkenazic world and a few are documented as early as the Middle Ages, that role became institutionalized in Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century. Some firzogerins were inspired to add to the liturgy for women by offering their own translations or creating original prayers....

Many of the prayers authored by these firzogerins suggest that they were produced for recitation in the synagogue before a female congregation. A good many of the synagogues had a separate women's room, including the one at Worms (Germany) and, later, Prague. Some even contained a separate ark in which a Torah was kept.

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WOMEN OF THE EAST

"Qoli Mimizrah" (My Voice is from the East) is a new series of books to spotlight Sephardic women and Jewish women from Muslim countries throughout history. You can submit manuscripts or proposals from a variety of disciplines, including folklore, literature, poetry, art or science to: Ben-Zvi Institute "Qoli Mimizrah" Series, POB 7660, Jerusalem 91076 Israel;. 972-2-5398844; mahonzvi@h2.hum.huji.ac.il

Yemenite Jewish Women, their migrations and integration into new communities, experiences today and in the recent past—in Yemen and beyond—will be the theme of Issue no. 11 of Nashim. Guest-edited by Nitza Druyan of Hofstra University, discussions will include gender relations within the Yemenite community and in its negotiations with host societies across all disciplines, including literature and the arts. Proposals by Feb. 1, 2005, by e-mail to nashim@schechter.ac.il.

WATCHING WOMEN

Kotel: Jewish Teens on Gender & Tradition is a 28-minute documentary film exploring prayer at the Western Wall in Jerusalem with 19 Jewish-American teenagers who discuss what arrangements at the kotel reveal about Jewish gender roles, tradition and conflicts between branches of Judaism. Written and directed by Stuart Z. Charme, it comes with 20-page discussion guide http://crab.rutgers.edu/~scharme/kotel.htm; scharme@camden.rutgers.edu

ALEXIS FISH

Magda wants to give you a good uplift.

A Good Uplift is a lighthearted documentary film by Faye Lederman, Cheryl Furjanic and Eve Lederman about a Lower East Side lingerie shop, where Jewish grandmother Magda "sizes you up, hooks you in, and sets you free in the perfect bra." Magda's message is that beautiful bodies come in all shapes and sizes (though a good uplift always helps!). A discussion guide is included. Rent or purchase the film by calling 800-343-5540; www.squeezethestone.org

No Way Out. How Susan Shear's family tried to escape the Nazis is told in simple play form through their actual letters. A Readers' Theatre presentation involves anywhere from 6-13 people, suitable for classrooms or intergenerational presentations. Accompanying slides show family photographs, documents, Nazi anti-Jewish laws and world events. www.nowayoutproject.com

A Jewish Women's Film Festival, Sunday, November 14, 2004 at the Alliance Francaise in New York City, features films about the lives, accomplishments and problems of Jewish women. Films cannot have been shown commercially in the New York area. Eleanor Leff Jewish Women's Resource Center of the National Council of Jewish Women NY Section, will present the "Ellie" Award for the Best Film in Festival and a special "Ellie" to a Jewish woman who has been a trailblazer for women in film. For more information call Annette Landau at 212-687-5030, x33 or email aland@ncjwny.org.

EDUCATION

Jewish Life on Campus. Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life has released its updated Guide to Jewish Life on Campus, an online database where you can check out over 500 campuses for kosher dining, Jewish studies courses, a cappella singing or social justice programs. Find local contacts and schools in such exotic locations as Omsk, Russia, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. www.hillel.org

CARING FOR THE VULNERABLE

Helping Jewish orphans. In 1999, Lauri Donahue read about the opening of a new Jewish children's home in Moscow, the Passin-Waxman Center, established with a $250,000 grant from Broadway producer Anita Waxman. Donahue discovered that no comprehensive list of Jewish orphanages existed, so with help from volunteers she created a clearinghouse for information about Jewish orphans in the former Soviet Union and needy Jewish children in Israel and elsewhere. Yeladim.org does not accept donations, though the site encourages support directly for these orphanages and suggests that young people make orphan-directed tzedakah part of their bar and bat mitzvah plans.

www.yeladim.org

Born in Our Hearts is an anthology of stories of adoption from birth mothers, adoptive parents, adoptees and others. Proceeds from the book will support the Alliance for Children Foundation, a non-profit international adoption agency established 1974, providing financial assistance to families adopting older and special needs children, and unique foster care programs. www.allforchildren.org www.afcfoundation.org

Night of a Thousand Dinners (N1KD) on November 4 is a simple concept—gathering with friends to help repair the global landmine crisis. First launched in 2001, nearly 2000 dinners have been held in over 50 countries, raising funds for mine clearance and survivor assistance in countries such as Afghanistan and Bosnia. To participate, hosts organize the meal and invite the guests. They can create their own favorite dishes or just keep it simple and order in pizza. Instead of bringing wine, flowers or dessert, each guest is asked to make a donation Adopt-A-Minefield® to help the landmine cause. www.1000dinners.com

Know an inspired Jewish educator? JERRI, the Jewish Educator Recruitment and Retention Initiative is an e-newsletter for success stories, discussions and generating enthusiasm for the field, and a resource to promote new initiatives (gender-sensitive ones, we hope) in your community. Aileen J. Goldstein is editor of the inaugural issue. http://secure.jesna.org/jerri

YOUR WRITING

"Home." Global perspectives by Jewish women. You can submit memoirs, poems, short stories, essays on home as place or state of mind influenced by religion, gender, politics, language. Up to 3,000 words by November 1. Hard copy, bio, SASE to: Editor, 2542 Wellington Ct., Evanston, IL 60201

Voices: Israel is the English Poetry Association's 15th international poetry contest. Prizes: $50-300. Send two copies of each submission by September 30, one without your name and address. Judge is Willa Schneeberg and winning poems will be published in the 2005 annual anthology. Fee: US$5 per poem to: P.O. Box 236, Kiriat Ata, 28101, Israel www.voicesisrael.com

Are you doing research in Jewish women's/gender studies? Do you want feedback on your work? The Jewish Feminist Research Group, a project of the Women's Studies Program at the Jewish Theological Seminary draws independent and affiliated scholars and graduate students to present or respond to papers, and to subscribe to the JFRG. For $36/year you receive all papers in advance of the sessions. Contact Beverly Bailis, JFRG: 718-858-4705, or email: jfrg@jtsa.edu

JEWISH CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Do you have a Jewish story for kids? Submit unpublished manuscripts of fiction, nonfiction or picture book text with Judaic content written for children ages 3 to 12 to The Jewish Literature for Children Story Writing Contest. Details and submissions forms found at www.jewishchildrens bookfest.org Susan Dubin, Story Writing Contest, 18901 Marilla St., Northridge, CA 91324

Jewish children's libraries in Russia. To help begin collections in cooperation with Russian educators, a group in the U.S. have purchased some favorite Jewish children's books, had them translated and pasted the sticker translation on each page. New or used books Jewish children's books in reasonable condition may be sent to: Bev Fox, 2809 W. Greenleaf, Chicago, IL 60645; bevfox2000@yahoo.com

The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition is looking for the best fiction manuscript appropriate for readers ages 8-11, written by an unpublished author. Taylor was the author of the All-of-a-Kind-Family series. Sponsor, the Association of Jewish Libraries, will accept submissions through Dec. 31, 2004. www.jewishlibraries.org, then click on Awards. Rachel Glasser, coordinator: rkglasser@aol.com.

JUSTICE FOR WOMEN

2nd International Conference on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community, sponsored by Jewish Women International and Partners, March 20-23, 2005 in Washington, will include meetings for clergy and a retreat for 18-25 year old activists, "When Push Comes to Shove It's No Longer Love: A Jewish Perspective on Gender, Power and Relationships." Proposals for workshops & more by November 30 to Rachel Keller, rkeller@jwi.org, 202-857-1300 or 800-343-2823, www.jwicalltoaction.org.

Reproductive Health and Rights Fellowships at Columbia University advance progressive reproductive and sexual health and women's rights policies around the world. The Soros Reproductive Health and Rights Fellowship at the Mailman School of Public Health brings together U.S. and international scholars and scholar-activists from a broad variety of disciplines. www.soros.org/initiatives/repro/focus_areas/reproductive_fellowships/application

Women's Rights and the Supreme Court. People For the American Way Foundation's new report, Courting Disaster 2004, shows how new, ultra-conservative judges will devastate civil rights, equal rights, privacy, the First Amendment, and much more. The report is available at: http://www.pfaw.org/pfaw/dfiles/file_352.pdf

—compiled by Naomi Danis

REMEMBRANCES

The Yizkor Book Translation Project, orchestrated largely by volunteer Joyce Field of West Lafayette, IN, makes available in English the Yiddish and Hebrew texts of various towns' Memorial Books—written as requiems to entire Jewish communities extinguished by World War II. www.jewishgen.org/yizkor

Women embroidering, 1927. From Polyn: Jewish Life in the Old Country, *by Alter Kacyzne.*

The Holocaust Documentation and Education Center is about to build the first South Florida Holocaust museum, to open within a year in Hollywood, FL. In addition to funds, the museum is seeking artifacts, large or small—a box car or a baby doll, a suitcase that a child carried with her to England, material taken from a synagogue on Kristallnacht, the currency with Rumkowski's picture that was used in the Lodz ghetto. They are seeking artifacts from the world before—when Jewish life was vibrant and diverse—along with material from the Holocaust years and the post-Holocaust life of survivors. Contact: Rositta E. Kenigsberg, Holocaust Documentation & Education Center, 13899 Biscayne Blvd, # 404, North Miami Beach, FL 33181; 305-919-5690; rositta@hdec.org

THINK TANK

Why We're Not Getting Married

by Martha Ackelsberg and Judith Plaskow

We love each other, and we've been in a committed relationship for nearly 20 years. We are residents of Massachusetts. But we're not getting married. We fully believe that gays and lesbians should have the right to marry, and we celebrate the fact that a significant barrier to our full citizenship has fallen. In not taking advantage of this new right, however, we can more comfortably advocate for the kind of society in which we would like to live.

Those who have fought for gay marriage have made clear that, in the U.S., important benefits are tied to marital status. As the judges of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, themselves, noted in the Goodridge decision, "marriage provides an abundance of legal, financial, and social benefits." Indeed, over 1000 federal benefits attach to marriage—benefits relating to social security, inheritance, tax status, child custody, and the like. Further, other significant benefits—most notably, health care—are often linked to marriage. Opening up this status to gays and lesbians makes an enormous difference to those in committed relationships in which at least one partner has access to benefits or resources to share.

But focusing on the right to marry perpetuates the idea that these rights ought to be linked to marriage. Were we to marry, we would be contributing to the perpetuation of a norm of coupledness in our society. The norm marginalizes those who are single, single parents, widowed, divorced or otherwise living in non-traditional constellations. The Massachusetts decision argued that "marriage is a vital social institution....The exclusive commitment of two individuals to each other nurtures love and mutual support; it brings stability to our society." Thus, the judges affirmed the right of gays and lesbians to marry while, at the same time, reinforcing very traditional beliefs about the centrality of marriage to the social order.

Seeking expanded benefits through marriage also contributes to what amounts to the increasing privatization of responsibility of caring for children, the elderly, the ill and disabled. The Massachusetts decision argues that gay marriage is good for society because children ought to be raised by two parents. The judges stated, in fact, that "it cannot be rational under our laws to penalize children by depriving them of State benefits" because of their parents' sexual orientation. But why is it any more rational to deprive children of state benefits because their parents are not married? Yet, precisely such arguments tying benefits to marriage are being used to justify repressive "marriage promotion" policies that pressure single mothers receiving welfare benefits to marry, and deny them (and their children) significant benefits if they do not marry.

A focus on marriage and familial status leads us, moreover, to neglect our social responsibilities to provide adequate childcare, day care, elder-care, etc. that would allow all adults who want to work to be able to do so. We all deserve a basic standard of care, as persons and as citizens. We should not have to rely on family members—generally the women in our families—to attend to our needs when we cannot care for ourselves. Similarly, a focus on increasing the numbers of people who can get access to health or retirement benefits through their spouses can easily lead us to ignore or deny our societal responsibility to provide basic health care and old age security to all our citizens, regardless of marital status.

It's not easy to walk away from the legal benefits that come with marriage. We are fortunate, in that we do not need to rely on one another's employers for our health coverage, and this allows us the luxury of deciding not to marry.

Nevertheless, as feminists and as lesbians, we have considered ourselves to be part of social movements that were modeling a variety of ways to be in the world, and to be in meaningful relationships, other than through marriage. Indeed, the early women's liberation and gay liberation movements challenged the claim that the married-couple nuclear family was the only legitimate way to organize our intimate lives. What happened to that vision? Where are the feminist and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered voices calling for the separation of civil and religious unions? Why not argue for the disestablishment of marriage as a legal form and the creation of a status of "civil union" that will allow people to create their own forms, and have them recognized by the state? At this moment, when there is so much focus on celebrating the right to marry, we want to hold up a vision of a society in which basic rights are not tied to marriage, and in which there are many ways to organize one's intimate life, marriage being only one of them.

Walking away from the legal benefits.

Martha Ackelsberg is Professor of Government and Women's Studies at Smith College and author of *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women*. **Judith Plaskow** is Professor of Religious Studies at Manhattan College, a former president of the American Academy of Religion, and author of *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* and the forthcoming *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics*.

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